EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

IN THREE PARTS.

PART I.—OF THE DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AND WHEREIN IT IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EVIDENCE ALLEGED FOR OTHER MIRACLES.

PART II.—OF THE AUXILIARY EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

PART III.—A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF SOME POPULAR OBJECTIONS.

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TO THE

HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

JAMES YORK, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF ELY.

MY LORD,

WHEN, five years ago, an important station in the University of Cambridge awaited your Lordship's disposal, you were pleased to offer it to me. The circumstances, under which this offer was made, demand a public acknowledgement. I had never seen your Lordship; I possessed no connection which could

could possibly recommend me to your favour; I was known to you, only by my endeavours, in common with many others, to discharge my duty as a tutor in the University; and by some very imperfect, but certainly well-intended, and, as you thought, useful publications since. In an age by no means wanting in examples of honourable patronage, although this deserve not to be mentioned in respect of the object of your Lordship's choice, it is inferior to none in the purity and disinterestedness of the motives which suggested it.

How the following work may be received, I pretend not to foretell. My first prayer concerning it is, that it may do good to any: my second hope, that it may assist, what it hath always been my earnest wish to promote, the religious part of an academical education. If in this latter view it might seem, in any

degree,

degree, to excuse your Lordship's judgement of its author, I shall be gratified by the reflection, that, to a kindness flowing from public principles, I have made the best public return in my power.

In the mean time, and in every event, I rejoice in the opportunity here afforded me, of testifying the sense I entertain of your Lordship's conduct, and of a notice which I regard as the most flattering distinction of my life.

I am,

My Lord,

With sentiments of gratitude
and respect,

Your Lordship's faithful
And most obliged Servant,

W. PALEY.

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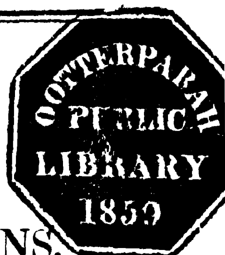
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PREPARATORY CONSIDERATIONS.

I DEEM it unnecessary to prove that mankind stood in need of a Revelation, because I have met with no serious person who thinks that, even under the Christian revelation, we have too much light, or any degree of assurance which is superfluous. I desire moreover, that, in judging of Christianity, it may be remembered, that the question lies between this religion and none: for, if the Christian religion be not credible, no one, with whom we have to do, will support the pretensions of any other.

Suppose then the world we live in to have had a Creator; suppose it to appear, from the predominant aim and tendency of

of the provisions and contrivances observable in the universe, that the Deity, when he formed it, consulted for the happiness of his sensitive creation; suppose the disposition which dictated this counsel to continue; suppose a part of the creation to have received faculties from their Maker, by which they are capable of rendering a moral obedience to his will, and of voluntarily pursuing any end for which he has designed them; suppose the Creator to intend for these, his rational and accountable agents, a second state of existence, in which their situation will be regulated by their behaviour in the first state, by which supposition (and by no other) the objection to the divine government in not putting a difference between the good and the bad, and the inconsistency of this confusion with the care and benevolence discoverable in the works of the Deity is done away; suppose it to be of the utmost importance to the subjects of this dispensation to know what is intended for them, that is, suppose the knowledge of it to be highly conducive to the happiness of the species, a purpose which so many provi-

sions

sions of nature are calculated to promote: Suppose, nevertheless, almost the whole race, either by the imperfection of their faculties, the misfortune of their situation, or by the loss of some prior revelation, to want this knowledge, and not to be likely without the aid of a new revelation to attain it: Under these circumstances, is it improbable that a revelation should be made? is it incredible that God should interpose for such a purpose? Suppose him to design for mankind a future state; is it unlikely that he should acquaint them with it?

Now in what way can a revelation be made, but by miracles? In none which we are able to conceive. Consequently, in whatever degree it is probable, or not very improbable, that a revelation should be communicated to mankind at all; in the same degree is it probable, or not very improbable, that miracles should be wrought. Therefore, when miracles are related to have been wrought in the promulgating of a revelation manifestly wanted, and if true, of inestimable value, the improbability which arises from the miraculous nature of

the things related, is not greater than the original improbability that such a revelation should be imparted by God.

I wish it however to be correctly understood, in what manner, and to what extent, this argument is alleged. We do not assume the attributes of the Deity, or the existence of a future state, in order to *prove* the reality of miracles. That reality always must be proved by evidence. We assert only, that in miracles adduced in support of revelation there is not any such antecedent improbability, as no testimony can surmount. And for the purpose of maintaining this assertion, we contend, that the incredibility of miracles related to have been wrought in attestation of a message from God, conveying intelligence of a future state of rewards and punishments, and teaching mankind how to prepare themselves for that state, is not in itself greater than the event, call it either probable or improbable, of the two following propositions being true: namely, first, that a future state of existence should be destined by God for his human creation: and, secondly,

that,

that, being so destined, he should acquaint them with it. It is not necessary for our purpose, that these propositions be capable of proof, or even that, by arguments drawn from the light of nature, they can be made out to be probable; it is enough that we are able to say concerning them, that they are not so violently improbable, so contradictory to what we already believe of the Divine power and character, that either the propositions themselves, or facts strictly connected with the propositions (and therefore no farther improbable than they are improbable), ought to be rejected at first sight, and to be rejected by whatever strength or complication of evidence they be attested.

This is the prejudication we would resist. For to this length does a modern objection to miracles go, viz. that no human testimony can in any case render them credible. I think the reflection above stated, that, if there be a revelation, there must be miracles, and that, under the circumstances in which the human species are placed, a revelation is not improbable, or

or not improbable in any great degree, to be a fair answer to the whole objection.

But since it is an objection which stands in the very threshold of our argument, and, if admitted, is a bar to every proof, and to all future reasoning upon the subject, it may be necessary, before we proceed farther, to examine the principle upon which it professes to be founded; which principle is concisely this, that it is contrary to experience that a miracle should be true, but not contrary to experience that testimony should be false.

Now there appears a small ambiguity in the term "experience," and in the phrases "contrary to experience," or "contradicting experience," which it may be necessary to remove in the first place. Strictly speaking, the narrative of a fact is *then* only contrary to experience, when the fact is related to have existed at a time and place, at which time and place we being present did not perceive it to exist; as, if it should be asserted, that in a particular room, and at a particular hour of a certain day,

day, a man was raised from the dead, in which room, and at the time specified, we, being present and looking on, perceived no such event to have taken place. Here the assertion is contrary to experience properly so called: and this is a contrariety which no evidence can surmount. It matters nothing, whether the fact be of a miraculous nature, or not. But although this be the experience, and the contrariety, which Archbishop Tillotson alleged in the quotation with which Mr. Hume opens his Essay, it is certainly not that experience, nor that contrariety, which Mr. Hume himself intended to object. And, short of this, I know no intelligible signification which can be affixed to the term "contrary to experience," but one, viz. that of not having ourselves experienced any thing similar to the thing related, or such things not being generally experienced by others. I say "not generally:" for to state concerning the fact in question, that no such thing was *ever* experienced, or that *universal* experience is against it, is to assume the subject of the controversy.

Now

Now the improbability which arises from the want (for this properly is a want, not a contradiction) of experience, is only equal to the probability there is, that, if the thing were true, we should experience things similar to it, or that such things would be generally experienced. Suppose it then to be true that miracles were wrought on the first promulgation of Christianity, when nothing but miracles could decide its authority, is it certain that such miracles would be repeated so often, and in so many places, as to become objects of general experience? Is it a probability approaching to certainty? is it a probability of any great strength or force? is it such as no evidence can encounter? And yet this probability is the exact *converse*, and therefore the exact measure, of the improbability which arises from the want of experience, and which Mr. Hume represents as invincible by human testimony.

It is not like alleging a new law of nature, or a new experiment in natural philosophy, because, when these are related,

lated, it is expected that, under the same circumstances, the same effect will follow universally; and in proportion as this expectation is justly entertained, the want of a corresponding experience negatives the history. But to expect concerning a miracle, that it should succeed upon a repetition, is to expect that which would make it cease to be a miracle, which is contrary to its nature as such, and would totally destroy the use and purpose for which it was wrought.

The force of experience as an objection to miracles, is founded in the presumption, either that the course of nature is invariable, or that, if it be ever varied, variations will be frequent and general. Has the necessity of this alternative been demonstrated? Permit us to call the course of nature the agency of an intelligent Being; and is there any good reason for judging this state of the case to be probable? Ought we not rather to expect, that such a Being, on occasions of peculiar importance, may interrupt the order which he had appointed, yet, that such occasions should return seldom; that these

these interruptious consequently should be confined to the experience of a few; that the want of it, therefore, in many, should be matter neither of surprise nor objection?

. . .

But as a continuation of the argument from experience, it is said that, when we advance accounts of miracles, we assign effects without causes, or we attribute effects to causes inadequate to the purpose, or to causes, of the operation of which we have no experience. Of what causes, we may ask, and of what effects does the objection speak? If it be answered that, when we ascribe the cure of the palsy to a touch, of blindness to the anointing of the eyes with clay, or the raising of the dead to a word, we lay ourselves open to this imputation; we reply, that we ascribe no such effects to such causes. We perceive no virtue or energy in these things more than in other things of the same kind. They are merely signs to connect the miracle with its end. The effect we ascribe simply to the volition of the Deity; of whose existence and power, not to say of whose presence and agency, we have previous and independent proof. We

have

have therefore all we seek for in the works of rational agents,—a sufficient power and an adequate motive. In a word, once believe that there is a God, and miracles are not incredible.

Mr. Hume states the case of miracles to be a contest of opposite improbabilities, that is to say, a question whether it be more improbable that the miracle should be true, or the testimony false: and this I think a fair account of the controversy. But herein I remark a want of argumentative justice, that, in describing the improbability of miracles, he suppresses all those circumstances of extenuation, which result from our knowledge of the existence, power, and disposition of the Deity; his concern in the creation; the end answered by the miracle, the importance of that end, and its subserviency to the plan pursued in the work of nature. As Mr. Hume has represented the question, miracles are alike incredible to him who is previously assured of the constant agency of a Divine Being, and to him who believes that no such Being exists in the universe. They are equally incredible, whether

whether related to have been wrought upon occasions the most deserving, and for purposes the most beneficial, or for no assignable end whatever, or for an end confessedly trifling or pernicious. This surely cannot be a correct statement. In adjusting also the other side of the balance, the strength and weight of testimony, this author has provided an answer to every possible accumulation of historical proof by telling us, that we are not obliged to explain how the story or the evidence arose. Now I think that we *are* obliged; not, perhaps, to shew by positive accounts how it did, but by a probable hypothesis how it might so happen. The existence of the testimony is a phenomenon; the truth of the fact solves the phenomenon. If we reject this solution, we ought to have some other to rest in; and none, even by our adversaries, can be admitted, which is not consistent with the principles that regulate human affairs and human conduct at present, or which makes men *then* to have been a different kind of beings from what they are now.

But

But the short consideration which, independently of every other, convinces me that there is no solid foundation in Mr. Hume's conclusion, is the following. When a theorem is proposed to a mathematician, the first thing he does with it is to try it upon a simple case; and if it produce a false result, he is sure that there must be some mistake in the demonstration. Now to proceed in this way with what may be called Mr. Hume's theorem. If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived: if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture, or submit to be tied up to a gibbet; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case; if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet, with no different effect; if it was at last executed; if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting

ing to be racked, burnt, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account;—still, if Mr. Hume's rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now I undertake to say that there exists not a sceptic in the world, who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity.

Instances of spurious miracles supported by strong apparent testimony, undoubtedly demand examination; Mr. Hume has endeavoured to fortify his argument by some examples of this kind. I hope in a proper place to shew that none of them reach the strength or circumstances of the Christian evidence. In these, however, consists the weight of his objection; in the principle itself, I am persuaded, there is none.

PART I.

OF THE DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AND WHEREIN IT IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EVIDENCE ALLEGED FOR OTHER MIRACLES.

THE two propositions which I shall endeavour to establish are these:—

I. That there is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

II. That there is *not* satisfactory evidence, that persons professing to be original witnesses of other miracles, in their nature as certain

certain as these are, have ever acted in the same manner, in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and properly in consequence of their belief of those accounts.

The first of these propositions, as it forms the argument, will stand at the head of the following *nine* chapters.

CHAPTER I.

There is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

To support this proposition, two points are necessary to be made out: first, that the founder of the institution, his associates and immediate followers, acted the part which the proposition imputes to them: secondly, that they did so in attestation of the miraculous history recorded in our Scriptures, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of this history.

Before we produce any particular testimony to the activity and sufferings which

compose the subject of our first assertion, it will be proper to consider the degree of probability which the assertion derives from the *nature of the case*, that is, by inferences from those parts of the case which, in point of fact, are on all hands acknowledged.

First then, the Christian Religion exists, and therefore by some means or other was established. Now it either owes the principle of its establishment, *i. e.* its first publication, to the activity of the person who was the founder of the institution, and of those who were joined with him in the undertaking, or we are driven upon the strange supposition, that, although they might lie by, others would take it up; although they were quiet and silent, other persons busied themselves in the success and propagation of their story. This is perfectly incredible. To me it appears little less than certain, that, if the first announcing of the religion by the founder had not been followed up by the zeal and industry of his immediate disciples, the attempt must have expired in its birth. Then as to the kind and de-

gree

gree of exertion which was employed, and the mode of life to which these persons submitted, we reasonably suppose it to be like that which we observe in all others who voluntarily become missionaries of a new faith. Frequent, earnest, and laborious preaching, constantly conversing with religious persons upon religion, a sequestration from the common pleasures, engagements, and varieties of life, and an addiction to one serious object, compose the habits of such men. I do not say that this mode of life is without enjoyment, but I say that the enjoyment springs from sincerity. With a consciousness at the bottom, of hollowness and falsehood, the fatigue and restraint would become insupportable. I am apt to believe that very few hypocrites engage in these undertakings; or, however, persist in them long. Ordinarily speaking, nothing can overcome the indolence of mankind, the love which is natural to most tempers of cheerful society and cheerful scenes, or the desire, which is common to all, of personal ease and freedom, but conviction.

Secondly, it is also highly probable, from the nature of the case, that the propagation of the new religion was attended with difficulty and danger. As addressed to the Jews, it was a system adverse not only to their habitual opinions, but to those opinions upon which their hopes, their partialities, their pride, their consolation was founded. This people, with or without reason, had worked themselves into a persuasion, that some signal and greatly advantageous change was to be effected in the condition of their country, by the agency of a long-promised messenger from heaven *. The rulers of the Jews, their leading sect, their priesthood, had been the authors of this persuasion to the common people. So that it was not merely the conjecture of theoretical divines, or the secret expectation of a few recluse devotees, but it

* "Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut eo tempore Judæâ profecti rerum potirentur." Sueton. Vespasian. cap. 4—8.

"Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum literis contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valesceret oriens, præfectique Judeâ rerum potirentur." Tacit. Hist. lib. v. cap. 9—13.

was become the popular hope and passion, and, like all popular opinions, undoubting, and impatient of contradiction. They clung to this hope under every misfortune of their country, and with more tenacity as their dangers or calamities increased. To find therefore that expectations so gratifying were to be worse than disappointed; that they were to end in the diffusion of a mild unambitious religion, which, instead of victories and triumphs, instead of exalting their nation and institution above the rest of the world, was to advance those whom they despised, to an equality with themselves, in those very points of comparison in which they most valued their own distinction, could be no very pleasing discovery to a Jewish mind; nor could the messengers of such intelligence expect to be well received or easily credited. The doctrine was equally harsh and novel. The extending of the kingdom of God to those who did not conform to the law of Moses, was a notion that had never before entered into the thoughts of a Jew.

The character of the new institution was, in other respects also, ungrateful to Jewish habits and principles. Their own religion was in a high degree technical. Even the enlightened Jew placed a great deal of stress upon the ceremonies of his law, saw in them a great deal of virtue and efficacy; the gross and vulgar had scarcely any thing else; and the hypocritical and ostentatious magnified them above measure, as being the instruments of their own reputation and influence. The Christian scheme, without formally repealing the Levitical code, lowered its estimation extremely. In the place of strictness and zeal in performing the observances which that code prescribed, or which tradition had added to it, the new sect preached up faith, well-regulated affections, inward purity and moral rectitude of disposition, as the true ground, on the part of the worshipper, of merit and acceptance with God. This, however rational it may appear, or recommending to us at present, did not by any means facilitate the plan then. On the contrary, to disparage those qualities which the highest characters in the

country

country valued themselves most upon, was a sure way of making powerful enemies. As if the frustration of the national hope was not enough, the long-esteemed merit of ritual zeal and punctuality was to be decried, and that by Jews preaching to Jews.

The ruling party at Jerusalem had just before crucified the Founder of the religion. That is a fact which will not be disputed. They therefore who stood forth to preach the religion, must necessarily reproach these rulers with an execution, which they could not but represent as an unjust and cruel murder. This would not render their office more easy, or their situation more safe.

With regard to the interference of the Roman government which was then established in Judea, I should not expect, that, despising, as it did, the religion of the country, it would, if left to itself, animadvert, either with much vigilance or much severity, upon the schisms and controversies which arose within it. Yet there

there was that in Christianity which might easily afford a handle of accusation with a jealous government. The Christians avowed an unqualified obedience to a new master. They avowed also that he was the person who had been foretold to the Jews under the suspected title of King. The spiritual nature of this kingdom, the consistency of this obedience with civil subjection, were distinctions too refined to be entertained by a Roman president, who viewed the business at a great distance, or through the medium of very hostile representations. Our histories accordingly inform us, that this was the turn which the enemies of Jesus gave to his character and pretensions in their remonstrances with Pontius Pilate. And Justin Martyr, about a hundred years afterwards, complains that the same mistake prevailed in his time; "ye, having heard that we are waiting for a kingdom, suppose, without distinguishing, that we mean a human kingdom, when in truth we speak of that which is with God*."

* Ap. 1me p. 16, ed. Thirl.

And it was undoubtedly a natural source of calumny and misconstruction.

The preachers of Christianity had therefore to contend with prejudice backed by power. They had to come forward to a disappointed people, to a priesthood possessing a considerable share of municipal authority, and actuated by strong motives of opposition and resentment; and they had to do this under a foreign government, to whose favour they made no pretensions, and which was constantly surrounded by their enemies. The well-known, because the experienced fate of reformers, whenever the reformation subverts some reigning opinion, and does not proceed upon a change that has already taken place in the sentiments of a country, will not allow, much less lead us to suppose, that the first propagators of Christianity at Jerusalem and in Judea, under the difficulties and the enemies they had to contend with, and entirely destitute as they were of force, authority, or protection, could execute their mission with personal ease and safety.

Let us next enquire, what might reasonably be expected by the preachers of Christianity when they turned themselves to the heathen public. Now the first thing that strikes us is, that the religion they carried with them was *exclusive*. It denied without reserve the truth of every article of heathen mythology, the existence of every object of their worship. It accepted no compromise; it admitted no comprehension. It must prevail, if it prevailed at all, by the overthrow of every statue, altar, and temple, in the world. It will not easily be credited, that a design, so bold as this was, could in any age be attempted to be carried into execution with impuity.

For it ought to be considered, that this was not setting forth, or magnifying the character and worship of some new competitor for a place in the Pantheon, whose pretensions might be discussed or asserted without questioning the reality of any others; it was pronouncing all other gods to be false, and all other worship vain. From the facility with which the Polytheism

theism of ancient nations admitted new objects of worship into the number of their acknowledged divinities, or the patience with which they might entertain proposals of this kind, we can argue nothing as to their toleration of a system, or of the publishers and active propagators of a system, which swept away the very foundation of the existing establishment. The one was nothing more than what it would be, in Popish countries, to add a saint to the calendar; the other was to abolish and tread under foot the calendar itself.

Secondly, it ought also to be considered, that this was not the case of philosophers propounding in their books, or in their schools, doubts concerning the truth of the popular creed, or even avowing their disbelief of it. These philosophers did not go about from place to place to collect proselytes from amongst the common people; to form in the heart of the country societies professing their tenets; to provide for the order, instruction, and permanency of these societies; nor did they enjoin their followers to withdraw themselves from the

public

public worship of the temples, or refuse a compliance with rites instituted by the laws*. These things are what the Christians did, and what the philosophers did not; and in these consisted the activity and danger of the enterprize.

Thirdly, it ought also to be considered, that this danger proceeded not merely from solemn acts and public resolutions of the state, but from sudden bursts of violence at particular places, from the licence of the populace, the rashness of some magistrates and negligence of others; from the influence and instigation of interested adversaries, and, in general, from the variety and warmth of opinion which an errand so novel and extraordinary could not fail of exciting. I can conceive that the teachers of Christianity might both fear and suffer much from these causes, without any

* The best of the ancient philosophers, Plato, Cicero, and Epictetus, allowed, or rather enjoined, men to worship the gods of the country, and in the established form. See passages to this purpose, collected from their works by Dr. Clarke, Nat. and Rev. Rel. p. 180, ed. v.—Except Socrates, they all thought it wiser to comply with the laws than to contend.

general

general persecution being denounced a-gainst them by imperial authority. Some length of time, I should suppose, might pass, before the vast machine of the Roman empire would be put in motion, or its attention be obtained to religious controversy: but, during that time, a great deal of ill usage might be endured, by a set of friendless, unprotected travellers, telling men, wherever they came, that the religion of their ancestors, the religion in which they had been brought up, the religion of the state and of the magistrate, the rites which they frequented, the pomp which they admired, was throughout a system of folly and delusion.

Nor do I think that the teachers of Christianity would find protection in that general disbelief of the popular theology, which is supposed to have prevailed amongst the intelligent part of the heathen public. It is by no means true that unbelievers are usually tolerant. They are not disposed, (and why should they?) to endanger the present state of things, by suffering a religion of which

they

they believe nothing, to be disturbed by another of which they believe as little. They are ready themselves to conform to any thing; and are, oftentimes, amongst the foremost to prooure conformity from others, by any method which they think likely to be efficacious. When was ever a change of religion patronized by infidels? How little, notwithstanding the reigning scepticism, and the magnified liberality of that age, the true principles of toleration were understood by the wisest men amongst them, may be gathered from two eminent and uncontested examples. The younger Pliny, polished as he was by all the literature of that soft and elegant period, could gravely pronounce this monstrous judgment: "Those who persisted in declaring themselves Christians, I ordered to be led away to punishment (*i. e.* to execution), for I DID NOT DOUBT, *whatever it was that they confessed, that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished.*" His master, Trajan, a mild and accomplishod prince, went, nevertheless, no farther in his sentiments of moderation and equity, than what ap-

pears

pears in the following rescript: "The Christians are not to be sought for; but if any are brought before you, and convicted, they are to be punished." And this direction he gives, after it had been reported to him by his own president, that, by the most strict examination, nothing could be discovered in the principles of these persons, but "a bad and excessive superstition," accompanied, it seems, with an oath or mutual federation, "to allow themselves in no crime or immoral conduct whatever." The truth is, the ancient heathens considered religion entirely as an affair of state, as much under the tuition of the magistrate, as any other part of the police. The religion of that age was not merely allied to the state; it was incorporated into it. Many of its offices were administered by the magistrate. Its titles of pontiffs, augurs, and flamens, were borne by senators, consuls, and generals. Without discussing, therefore, the truth of the theology, they resented every affront put upon the established worship, as a direct opposition to the authority of government.

Add

Add to which, that the religious systems of those times, however ill supported by evidence, had been long established. The *ancient* religion of a country has always many votaries, and sometimes not the fewer, because its origin is hidden in remoteness and obscurity. Men have a natural veneration for antiquity, especially in matters of religion. What Tacitus says of the Jewish, was more applicable to the heathen establishment; "Hi ritus, quoquo modo inducti, antiquitate defenduntur." It was also a splendid and sumptuous worship. It had its priesthood, its endowments, its temples. Statuary, painting, architecture, and music, contributed their effect to its ornament and magnificence. It abounded in festival shows and solemnities, to which the common people are greatly addicted, and which were of a nature to engage them much more than any thing of that sort among us. These things would retain great numbers on its side by the fascination of spectacle and pomp, as well as interest many in its preservation by the advantage which they drew from it.

"It

"It was moreover interwoven," as Mr. Gibbon rightly represents it, "with every circumstance of business or pleasure, of public or private life, with all the offices and amusements of society." On the due celebration also of its rites, the people were taught to believe, and did believe, that the prosperity of their country in a great measure depended.

I am willing to accept the account of the matter, which is given by Mr. Gibbon: "The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosophers as equally false, and by the magistrate as equally useful:" and I would ask, from which of these three classes of men were the Christian missionaries to look for protection or impunity? Could they expect it from the people, "whose acknowledged confidence in the public religion" they subverted from its foundation? From the philosopher, who, "considering all religions as equally false," would of course rank theirs among the number, with the addition of regarding

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them as busy and troublesome zealots? Or from the magistrate, who, satisfied with the "utility" of the subsisting religion, would not be likely to countenance a spirit of proselytism and innovation;—a system, which declared war against every other, and which, if it prevailed, must end in a total rupture of public opinion;—an upstart religion, in a word, which was not content with its own authority, but must disgrace all the settled religions of the world? It was not to be imagined that he would endure with patience, that the religion of the emperor and of the state should be calumniated and borne down by a company of superstitious and despicable Jews.

Lastly; the *nature of the case affords* a strong proof, that the original teachers of Christianity, in consequence of their new profession, entered upon a new and singular course of life. We may be allowed to presume, that the institution which they preached to others, they conformed to in their own persons; because this is no more than what every teacher of a new

religion

religion both does, and must do, in order to obtain either proselytes or hearers. The change which this would produce was very considerable. It is a change which we do not easily estimate, because, ourselves and all about us being habituated to the institution from our infancy, it is that we neither experience nor observe. After men became Christians, much of their time was spent in prayer and devotion, in religious meetings, in celebrating the eucharist, in conferences, in exhortations, in preaching, in an affectionate intercourse with one another, and correspondence with other societies. Perhaps their mode of life, in its form and habit, was not very unlike the Unitas Fratrum, or of modern Methodists. Think then what it was to become *such* at Corinth, at Ephesus, at Antioch, or even at Jerusalem. How new! how aliene from all their former habits and ideas, and from those of every body about them! What a revolution there must have been of opinions and prejudices to bring the matter to this!

We know what the precepts of the religion are; how pure, how benevolent, how disinterested a conduct they enjoin; and that this purity and benevolence are extended to the very thoughts and affections. We are not perhaps at liberty to take for granted, that the lives of the preachers of Christianity were as perfect as their lessons: but we are entitled to contend, that the observable part of their behaviour must have agreed in a great measure with the duties which they taught. There was therefore (which is all that we assert) a course of life pursued by them, different from that which they before led. And this is of great importance. Men are brought to any thing almost sooner than to change their habit of life, especially when the change is either inconvenient, or made against the force of natural inclination, or with the loss of accustomed indulgences. "It is the most difficult of all things to convert men from vicious habits to virtuous ones, as every one may judge from what he feels in himself, as well as from what he sees in others*."

* Hartley's Essays on Man, p. 190.

It is almost like making men over again.

Left then to myself, and without any more information than a knowledge of the existence of the religion, of the general story upon which it is founded, and that no act of power, force, or authority, was concerned in its first success, I should conclude, from the very nature and exigency of the case, that the Author of the religion during his life, and his immediate disciples after his death, *exerted* themselves in spreading and publishing the institution throughout the country in which it began, and into which it was first carried; that, in the prosecution of this purpose, they underwent the labours and troubles which we observe the propagators of new sects to undergo; that the attempt must necessarily have also been in a high degree dangerous; that, from the subject of the mission, compared with the fixed opinions and prejudices of those to whom the missionaries were to address themselves, they could hardly fail of encountering strong and frequent opposition; that, by the hand

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of government, as well as from the sudden fury and unbridled licence of the people, they would oftentimes experience injurious and cruel treatment; that, at any rate, they must have always had so much to fear for their personal safety, as to have passed their lives in a state of constant peril and anxiety; and lastly, that their mode of life and conduct, visibly at least, corresponded with the institution which they delivered, and, so far, was both new, and required continual self-denial.

CHAPTER II.

There is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

After thus considering what was *likely* to happen, we are next to enquire how the transaction is represented in the several accounts that have come down to us. And this enquiry is properly preceded by the other, for as much as the reception of these accounts may depend in part on the credibility of what they contain.

The obscure and distant view of Christianity, which some of the heathen writers of that age had gained, and which a few

passages

passages in their remaining works incidentally discover to us, offers itself to our notice in the first place: because, so far as this evidence goes, it is the concession of adversaries; the source from which it is drawn is unsuspected. Under this head, a quotation from Tacitus, well known to every scholar, must be inserted, as deserving particular attention. The reader will bear in mind that this passage was written about seventy years after Christ's death, and that it relates to transactions which took place about thirty years after that event.—Speaking of the fire which happened at Rome in the time of Nero, and of the suspicions which were entertained, that the emperor himself was concerned in causing it, the historian proceeds in his narrative and observations thus:

"But neither these exertions, nor his largesses to the people, nor his offerings to the gods, did away the infamous imputation under which Nero lay, of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To put an end therefore to this report, he laid the guilt, and inflicted the most cruel punishments,

ments, upon a set of people who were holden in abhorrence for their crimes, and called by the vulgar, *Christians.* The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator Pontius Pilate.—This pernicious superstition, thus checked for a while, broke out again; and spread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither every thing bad upon the earth finds its way, and is practised. Some who confessed their sect, were first seized, and afterwards, by their information, a vast multitude were apprehended, who were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning Rome, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings at their execution were aggravated by insult and mockery: for, some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs;—some were crucified;—and others were wrapped in pitched shirts*, and set on fire when the day closed, that they might

* This is rather a paraphrase, but is justified by what the Shcoliast upon Juvenal says;—"Nero maleficos homines tædâ et papyro et cerâ supervestiebat, et sic ad ignem admoveri jubebat." Lard. Jewish and Heath. Test. vol. i. p. 359.

serve

serve as lights to illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens for these executions, and exhibited at the same time a mock Circensian entertainment; being a spectator of the whole, in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the spectacles from his car. This conduct made the sufferers pitied; and though they were criminals, and deserving the severest punishments, yet they were considered as sacrificed, not so much out of a regard to the public good, as to gratify the cruelty of one man."

Our concern with this passage at present is only so far as it affords a presumption in support of the proposition which we maintain, concerning the activity and sufferings of the first teachers of Christianity. Now, considered in this view, it proves three things: 1st, that the Founder of the institution was put to death; 2dly, that in the same country in which he was put to death, the religion, after a short check, broke out again and spread; 3dly, that it is so spread, as that, within thirty-four years from

from the author's death, a very great number of Christians *(ingens eorum multitudo)* were found at Rome. From which fact, the two following inferences may be fairly drawn: first, that, if, in the space of thirty-four years from its commencement, the religion had spread throughout Judea, had extended itself to Rome, and there had numbered a great multitude of converts, the original teachers and missionaries of the institution could not have been *idle;* secondly, that when the author of the undertaking was put to death as a malefactor for his attempt, the endeavours of his followers to establish his religion, in the same country, amongst the same people, and in the same age, could not but be attended with danger.

Suetonius, a writer contemporary with Tacitus, describing the transactions of the same reign, uses these words: "Affecti suppliciis, Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ et maleficæ*." The Christians, a set of men of a new and mischievous (or magical) superstition, were punished.

* Suet. Nero. cap. 16.

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Since it is not mentioned *here* that the burning of the city was the pretence of the punishment of the Christians, or that they were the Christians of Rome who alone suffered, it is probable that Suetonius refers to some more general persecution than the short and occasional one which Tacitus describes.

Juvenal, a writer of the same age with the two former, and intending, it should seem, to commemorate the cruelties exercised under Nero's government, has the following lines *:

> "Pone Tigellinum, tædâ lucebis in illâ,
> Quâ stantes ardent, qui fixo gutture fumant,
> Et latum mediâ sulcum deducit † arenâ."

"Describe Tigellinus (a creature of Nero), and you shall suffer the same punishment with those who stand burning in their own flame and smoke, their head being held up by a stake fixed to their chin, till they make a long stream of blood and melted sulphur on the ground."

* Sat. i. ver. 155. † Forsan "deducis."

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If this passage were considered by itself, the subject of allusion might be doubtful; but, when connected with the testimony of Suetonius, as to the actual punishment of the Christians by Nero, and with the account given by Tacitus of the *species* of punishment which they were made to undergo, I think it sufficiently probable, that these were the executions to which the poet refers.

These things, as has already been observed, took place within thirty-one years after Christ's death, that is, according to the course of nature, in the life-time, probably, of some of the Apostles, and certainly in the life-time of those who were converted by the Apostles, or who were converted in their time. If then the Founder of the religion was put to death in the execution of his design; if the first race of converts to the religion, many of them, suffered the greatest extremities for their profession; it is hardly credible, that those who came *between* the two, who were companions of the author of the institution du-

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ring his life, and the teachers and propagators of the institution after his death, could go about their undertaking with ease and safety.

The testimony of the younger Pliny belongs to a later period; for although he was contemporary with Tacitus and Suetonius, yet his account does not, like theirs, go back to the transactions of Nero's reign, but is confined to the affairs of his own time. His celebrated letter to Trajan was written about seventy years after Christ's death; and the information to be drawn from it, so far as it is connected with our argument, relates principally to two points: first, to the *number* of Christians in Bithynia and Pontus, which was so considerable as to induce the governor of these provinces to speak of them in the following terms: "Multi, omnis ætatis, utriusque sexûs etiam;—neque enim civitates tantùm, sed vicos etiam et agros, superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est." "There are many of every age and of both sexes;—nor has the contagion

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of this superstition seized cities only, but smaller towns also, and the open country." Great exertions must have been used by the preachers of Christianity to produce this state of things, within this time. Secondly, to a point which has been already noticed, and which I think of importance to be observed, namely, the sufferings to which Christians were exposed, *without* any public persecution being denounced against them by sovereign authority. For, from Pliny's doubt how he was to act, his silence concerning any subsisting law on the subject, his requesting the emperor's rescript, and the emperor, agreeably to his request, propounding a rule for his direction, without reference to any prior rule, it may be inferred, that there was, at that time, no public edict in force against the Christians. Yet from this same epistle of Pliny it appears, "that accusations, trials, and examinations, were, and had been, going on against them in the provinces over which he presided; that schedules were delivered by anonymous informers, containing the names of persons who were suspected of holding or of favouring the religion;

religion; that, in consequence of these informations, many had been apprehended, of whom some boldly avowed their profession, and died in the cause; others denied that they were Christians; others, acknowledging that they had once been Christians, declared that they had long ceased to be such." All which demonstrates, that the profession of Christianity was at that time (in that country at least) attended with fear and danger: and yet this took place without any edict from the Roman sovereign, commanding or authorizing the persecution of Christians. This observation is farther confirmed by a rescript of Adrian to Minucius Fundanus, the pro-consul of Asia*: from which rescript it appears that the custom of the people of Asia was to proceed against the Christians with tumult and uproar. This disorderly practice, I say, is recognized in the edict, because the emperor enjoins, that, for the future, if the Christians were guilty, they should be legally brought to trial, and not be pursued by importunity and clamour.

* Lard. Heath. Test. v. ii. p. 110.

Martial

Martial wrote a few years before the younger Pliny; and, as his manner was, made the sufferings of the Christians the subject of his ridicule*. Nothing however could shew the notoriety of the fact with more certainty than this does. Martial's testimony, as well indeed as Pliny's, goes also to another point, viz. that the deaths of these men were martyrdoms in the strictest sense, that is to say, were so voluntary, that it was in their power, at the time of pronouncing the sentence, to have averted the execution, by consenting to join in heathen sacrifices.

The constancy, and by consequence the sufferings of the Christians of this period, is also referred to by Epictetus, who imputes their intrepidity to madness, or to a kind of fashion or habit; and about fifty years

* In matutinâ nuper spectatus arenâ
Mucius, imposuit qui sua membra focis,
Si patiens fortisque tibi durusque videtur,
Abderitanæ pectora plebis habes;
Nam cum dicatur, tunicâ præsente molestâ,
Ure † manum: plus est dicere, Non facio.

† Forsan, "thure manum."

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afterwards, by Marcus Aurelius, who ascribes it to obstinacy. "Is it possible (Epictetus asks) that a man may arrive at this temper, and become indifferent to those things, from madness or from habit, *as the Galileans* * ?" Let this preparation of the mind (to die) arise from its own judgment, and not from obstinacy *like the Christians* †."

* Epict. l. iv. c. 7.

† Marc. Aur. Med. l. xi. c. 3.

CHAPTER III.

There is satisfactory evidence, that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

OF the primitive condition of Christianity, a distant only and general view can be acquired from heathen writers. It is in our own books that the detail and interior of the transaction must be sought for. And this is nothing different from what might be expected. Who would write a history of Christianity, but a Christian? Who was likely to record the travels, sufferings, labours, or successes of the

 Apostles,

Apostles, but one of their own number, or of their followers? Now these books come up in their accounts to the full extent of the proposition which we maintain. We have four histories of Jesus Christ. We have a history taking up the narrative from his death, and carrying on an account of the propagation of the religion, and of some of the most eminent persons engaged in it, for a space of nearly thirty years. We have, what some may think still more original, a collection of letters, written by certain principal agents in the business, upon the business, and in the midst of their concern and connection with it. And we have these writings severally attesting the point which we contend for, viz. the sufferings of the witnesses of the history, and attesting it in every variety of form in which it can be conceived to appear: directly and indirectly, expressly and incidentally, by assertion, recital, and allusion, by narratives of facts, and by arguments and discourses built upon these facts, either referring to them, or necessarily presupposing them.

I remark this variety, because, in examining ancient records, or indeed any species of testimony, it is, in my opinion, of the greatest importance to attend to the information or grounds of argument which are *casually* and *undesignedly* disclosed; forasmuch as this species of proof is, of all others, the least liable to be corrupted by fraud or misrepresentation.

I may be allowed therefore, in the enquiry which is now before us, to suggest some conclusions of this sort, as preparatory to more direct testimony.

1. Our books relate, that Jesus Christ, the founder of the religion, was, in consequence of his undertaking, put to death, as a malefactor, at Jerusalem. This point at least will be granted, because it is no more than what Tacitus has recorded. They then proceed to tell us, that the religion was, *notwithstanding*, set forth at this same city of Jerusalem, propagated thence throughout Judea, and afterwards preached in other parts of the Roman empire. These points also are fully confirmed

firmed by Tacitus; who informs us that the religion, after a short check, broke out again in the country where it took its rise; that it not only spread throughout Judea, but had reached Rome; and that it had there great multitudes of converts: and all this within thirty years after its commencement. Now these facts afford a strong inference in behalf of the proposition which we maintain. What could the disciples of Christ expect for themselves when they saw their Master put to death? Could they hope to escape the dangers, in which he had perished? If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you, was the warning of common sense. With this example before their eyes, they could not be without a full sense of the peril of their future enterprise.

2. Secondly, all the histories agree in representing Christ as foretelling the persecution of his followers:—

" Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall

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be hated of all nations for my name's sake*."

"When affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended †."

"They shall lay hands on you, aud persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake:—and ye shall be betrayed both by parents and brethren, and kinsfolks and friends, and some of you shall they cause to be put to death ‡."

"The time cometh, that he that killeth you, will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them §."

* Matt. xxiv. 9.

† Mark iv. 17. See also chap. x. 30.

‡ Luke xxi. 12—16. See also chap. xi. 49.

§ John xvi. 4. See also chap. xv. 20; xvi. 33.

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'I am not entitled to argue from these passages, that Christ actually did foretel these events, and that they did accordingly come to pass; because that would be at once to assume the truth of the religion: but I am entitled to contend, that one side or other of the following disjunction is true; either that the Evangelists have delivered what Christ really spoke, and that the event corresponded with the prediction; or that they put the prediction into Christ's mouth, because, at the time of writing the history, the event had turned out so to be: for, the only two remaining suppositions appear in the highest degree incredible; which are, either that Christ filled the minds of his followers with fears and apprehensions, without any reason or authority for what he said, and contrary to the truth of the case; or that, although Christ had never foretold any such thing, and the event would have contradicted him if he had, yet historians who lived in the age when the event was known, falsely, as well as officiously, ascribed these words to him.

3. Thirdly, these books abound with exhortations to patience, and with topics of comfort under distress.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us *."

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body; —knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.——For which cause we faint not; but, though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a mo-

* Rom. viii. 35. 37.

ment,

ment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory *."

"Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy †."

"Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used; for ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great

* 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17.
† James v. 10, 11.

recompence of reward; for ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise *."

"So that we ourselves glory in you in the Churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure. Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom for which ye also suffer †.

"We rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope ‡."

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are

* Heb. x. 32—36.

† 2 Thess. i. 4, 5.

‡ Rom. v. 3, 4.

partakers

partakers of Christ's sufferings.——Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator *."

What could all these texts mean, if there was nothing in the circumstances of the times which required patience,—which called for the exercise of constancy and resolution? Or will it be pretended, that these exhortations (which, let it be observed, come not from one author, but from many) were put in, merely to induce a belief in after-ages, that the Christians were exposed to dangers which they were not exposed to, or underwent sufferings which they did not undergo? If these books belong to the age, to which they lay claim, and in which age, whether genuine or spurious, they certainly did appear, this supposition cannot be maintained for a moment; because I think it impossible to believe, that passages, which must be deemed, not only unintelligible, but false, by the persons into whose hands

* 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13, 19.

the books upon their publication were to come, should nevertheless be inserted, for the purpose of producing an effect upon remote generations. In forgeries which do not appear till many ages after that to which they pretend to belong, it is possible that some contrivance of that sort may take place; but in no others can it be attempted.

CHAP.

CHAPTER IV.

There is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

THE account of the treatment of the religion, and of the exertions of its first preachers, as stated in our Scriptures, (not in a professed history of persecutions, or in the connected manner in which I am about to recite it, but dispersedly and occasionally, in the course of a mixed general history, which circumstance alone negatives the supposition of any fraudulent design,) is the following: "That the Founder of Christianity, from the commencement

mencement of his ministry to the time of his violent death, employed himself wholly in publishing the institution in Judea and Galilee; that, in order to assist him in this purpose, he made choice out of the number of his followers, of twelve persons, who might accompany him as he travelled from place to place; that, except a short absence upon a journey, in which he sent them, two by two, to announce his mission, and one, of a few days, when they went before him to Jerusalem, these persons were statedly and constantly attending upon him; that they were with him at Jerusalem when he was apprehended and put to death; and that they were commissioned by him, when his own ministry was concluded, to publish his Gospel, and collect disciples to it from all countries of the world." The account then proceeds to state, " That, a few days after his departure, these persons, with some of his relations, and some who had regularly frequented their society, assembled at Jerusalem; that, considering the office of preaching the religion as now devolved upon them, and one of their number

number having deserted the cause, and, repenting of his perfidy, having destroyed himself, they proceeded to elect another into his place, and that they were careful to make their election, out of the number of those who had accompanied their Master from the first to the last, in order, as they alleged, that it might be a witness, together with themselves, of the principal facts which they were about to produce and relate concerning him *; that they began their work at Jerusalem, by publicly asserting that this Jesus, whom the rulers and inhabitants of that place had so lately crucified, was, in truth, the person in whom all their prophecies and long expectations terminated; that he had been sent amongst them by God; and that he was appointed by God the future judge of the human species; that all who were solicitous to secure to themselves happiness after death, ought to receive him as such, and to make profession of their belief, by being baptized in his name †." The history goes on to relate, "that con-

* Acts i. 21, 22.

† Acts xi.

siderable numbers accepted this proposal, and that they who did so, formed amongst themselves a strict union and society*; that, the attention of the Jewish government being soon drawn upon them, two of the principal persons of the twelve, and who also had lived most intimately and constantly with the Founder of the religion, were seized as they were discoursing to the people in the temple; that, after being kept all night in prison, they were brought the next day before an assembly, composed of the chief persons of the Jewish magistracy and priesthood; that this assembly, after some consultation, found nothing, at that time, better to be done towards suppressing the growth of the sect, than to threaten their prisoners with punishment, if they persisted; that these men, after expressing, in decent but firm language, the obligation under which they considered themselves to be, to declare what they knew, "to speak the things which they had seen and heard," returned from the council, and reported what had passed to their companions; that this report, whilst it apprized them of the danger of their

* Acts v. 41.

situation and undertaking, had no other effect upon their conduct, than to produce in them a general resolution to persevere, and an earnest prayer to God to furnish them with assistance, and to inspire them with fortitude, proportioned to the increasing exigency of the service*." A very short time after this, we read "that all the twelve Apostles were seized and cast into prison†; that, being brought a second time before the Jewish Sanhedrim, they were upbraided with their disobedience to the injunction which had been laid upon them, and beaten for their contumacy; that, being charged once more to desist, they were suffered to depart; that however they neither quitted Jerusalem, nor ceased from preaching, both daily in the temple, and from house to house‡; and that the twelve considered themselves as so entirely and exclusively devoted to this office, that they now transferred what may be called the temporal affairs of the society to other hands||."

Hitherto

* Acts iv. † Acts v. 18. ‡ Acts v.

|| I do not know that it has ever been insinuated, that the Christian mission, in the hands of the Apostles, was a scheme for

Hitherto the preachers of the new religion seem to have had the common people on their side; which is assigned as the reason why the Jewish rulers did not, at this time, think it prudent to proceed to greater extremities. It was not long, however, before the enemies of the institution found means to represent it to the people as tending to subvert their law, degrade

for making a fortune, or for getting money. But it may nevertheless be fit to remark upon this passage of their history, how perfectly free they appear to have been from any pecuniary or interested views whatever. The most tempting opportunity which occurred, of making a gain of their converts, was by the custody and management of the public funds, when some of the richer members, intending to contribute their fortunes to the common support of the society, sold their possessions, and laid down the prices at the Apostles' feet. Yet, so insensible, or undesirous, were they of the advantage which that confidence afforded, that we find, they very soon disposed of the trust, by putting it into the hands, not of nominees of their own, but of stewards formally elected for the purpose by the society at large.

We may add also, that this excess of generosity, which cast private property into the public stock, was so far from being required by the Apostles, or imposed as a law of Christianity, that Peter reminds Ananias that he had been guilty, in his behaviour, of an officious and voluntary prevarication; for whilst, says he, thy estate remained unsold, "was it not thine own? and, after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?"

 their

their lawgiver, and dishonour their temple*. And these insinuations were dispersed with so much success, as to induce the people to join with their superiours in the stoning of a very active member of the new community.

The death of this man was the signal of a general persecution, the activity of which may be judged of from one anecdote of the time: "As for Saul, he made havock of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison †." This persecution raged at Jerusalem with so much fury, as to drive ‡ most of the new converts out of the place, except the twelve Apostles. The converts, thus "scattered abroad," preached the religion wherever they came; and their preaching was, in effect, the preaching of the *twelve*; for it was so far carried on in

* Acts vi. 12.

† Acts viii. 3.

‡ Acts viii. 1. "And they were *all* scattered abroad:" but the term "all" is not, I think, to be taken strictly, or as denoting more than the *generality*; in like manner as in Acts ix. 35, "And *all* that dwelt at Lydda and Saron, saw him, and turned to the Lord."

concert

concert and correspondence with *them*, that when they heard of the success of their emissaries in a particular country, they sent two of their number to the place, to complete and confirm the mission.

An event now took place, of great importance in the future history of the religion. The* persecution which had begun at Jerusalem, followed the Christians to other cities, in which the authority of the Jewish Sanhedrim over those of their own nation was allowed to be exercised. A young man, who had signalized himself by his hostility to the profession, and had procured a commission from the council at Jerusalem to seize any converted Jews whom he might find at Damascus, suddenly became a proselyte to the religion which he was going about to extirpate. The new convert not only shared, on this extraordinary change, the fate of his companions, but brought upon himself a double measure of enmity from the party which he had left. The Jews at Damascus, on his return to that city, watched the

* Acts ix.

gates night and day, with so much diligence, that he escaped from their hands only by being let down in a basket by the wall. Nor did he find himself in greater safety at Jerusalem, whither he immediately repaired. Attempts were there also soon set on foot to destroy him; from the danger of which he was preserved by being sent away to Cilicia, his native country.

For some reason, not mentioned, perhaps not known, but probably connected with the civil history of the Jews, or with some danger* which engrossed the public attention, an intermission about this time took place in the sufferings of the Christians. This happened, at the most, only seven or eight, perhaps only three or four years after Christ's death. Within which period, and notwithstanding that the late persecution occupied part of it, Churches, or societies

* Dr. Lardner (in which he is followed also by Dr. Benson) ascribes this cessation of the persecution of the Christians to the attempt of Caligula to set up his own statue in the Temple of Jerusalem, and to the consternation thereby excited in the minds of the Jewish people; which consternation for a season suspended every other contest.

of

of believers, had been formed in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria; for we read that the Churches in these countries "had *now rest*, and were edified, and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied*." The original preachers of the religion did not remit their labours or activity during this season of quietness; for we find one, and he a very principal person among them, passing throughout all quarters. We find also those who had been before expelled from Jerusalem by the persecution which raged there, travelling as far as Phœnice, Cyprus, and Antioch †; and, lastly, we find Jerusalem again in the centre of the mission, the place whither the preachers returned from their several excursions, where they reported the conduct and effects of their ministry, where questions of public concern were canvassed and settled, whence directions were sought, and teachers sent forth.

The time of this tranquillity did not, however, continue long. Herod Agrippa,

* Acts ix. 31. † Acts xi. 19.

who

who had lately acceded to the government of Judea, "stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the Church *." He began his cruelty by beheading one of the twelve original Apostles, a kinsman and constant companion of the Founder of the religion. Perceiving that this execution gratified the Jews, he proceeded to seize, in order to put to death, another of the number,—and him, like the former, associated with Christ during his life, and eminently active in the service since his death. This man was, however, delivered from prison, as the account states †, miraculously, and made his escape from Jerusalem.

These things are related, not in the general terms under which, in giving the outlines of the history, we have here mentioned them, but with the utmost particularity of names, persons, places, and circumstances; and, what is deserving of notice, without the smallest discoverable propensity in the historian to magnify the fortitude, or exaggerate the sufferings of his party. When they fled for their lives, he

* Acts xii. 1. † Acts xii. 3—17.

tells

tells us. When the Churches had rest, he remarks it. When the people took their part, he does not leave it without notice. When the Apostles were carried a second time before the Sanhedrim, he is careful to observe that they were brought without violence. When milder counsels were suggested, he gives us the author of the advice, and the speech which contained it. When, in consequence of this advice, the rulers contented themselves with threatening the Apostles, and commanding them to be beaten with stripes, without urging at that time the persecution farther, the historian candidly and distinctly records their forbearance. When, therefore, in other instances, he states heavier persecutions, or actual martyrdoms, it is reasonable to believe that he states them because they were true, and not from any wish to aggravate, in his account, the sufferings which Christians sustained, or to extol, more than it deserved, their patience under them.

Our history now pursues a narrower path. Leaving the rest of the Apostles, and the original associates of Christ, engaged in the propagation

propagation of the new faith, (and who there is not the least reason to believe abated in their diligence or courage,) the narrative proceeds with the separate memoirs of that eminent teacher, whose extraordinary and sudden conversion to the religion, and corresponding change of conduct, had before been circumstantially described. This person, in conjunction with another, who appeared among the earlier members of the society at Jerusalem, and amongst the immediate adherents * of the twelve Apostles, set out from Antioch upon the express business of carrying the new religion through the various provinces of the Lesser Asia †. During this expedition, we find that, in almost every place to which they came, their persons were insulted, and their lives endangered. After being expelled from Antioch in Pisidia, they repaired to Iconium ‡. At Iconium, an attempt was made to stone them; at Lystra, whither they fled from Iconium, one of them actually was stoned, and drawn out of the city for dead §. These two men, though not

* Acts iv. 36.
† Acts xiii. 2.
‡ Acts xiii. 50.
§ Acts xiv. 5.

themselves

themselves original Apostles, were acting in connection and conjunction with the original Apostles; for, after the completion of their journey, being sent on a particular commission to Jerusalem, they there related to the Apostles * and elders the events and success of their ministry, and were, in return, recommended by them to the Churches, "as men who had hazarded their lives in the cause."

The treatment which they had experienced in the first progress, did not deter them from preparing for a second. Upon a dispute, however, arising between them, but not connected with the common subject of their labours, they acted as wise and sincere men would act; they did not retire in disgust from the service in which they were engaged, but, each devoting his endeavours to the advancement of the religion, they parted from one another, and set forwards upon separate routes. The history goes along with one of them; and the second enterprize to him was attended with the same dangers and persecutions as both had

* Acts xv. 12—26.

met with in the first. The Apostle's travels hitherto had been confined to Asia. He now crosses, for the first time, the Ægean Sea, and carries with him, amongst others, the person whose accounts supply the information we are stating*. The first place in Greece at which he appears to have stopped was Philippi in Macedonia. Here himself and one of his companions were cruelly whipped, cast into prison, and kept there under the most rigorous custody, being thrust, whilst yet smarting with their wounds, into the inner dungeon, and their feet made fast in the stocks†. Notwithstanding this unequivocal specimen of the usage which they had to look for in that country, they went forward in the execution of their errand. After passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica; in which city, the house in which they lodged was assailed by a party of their enemies, in order to bring them out to the populace. And when, fortunately for their preservation, they were not found at home, the master of the house was dragged before the magistrate for

* Acts xvii. 11.

† Ibid. ver. 23, 24, 33.

admitting them within his doors *. Their reception at the next city was something better: but neither had they continued long before their turbulent adversaries, the Jews, excited against them such commotions amongst the inhabitants, as obliged the Apostle to make his escape by a private journey to Athens †. The extremity of the progress was Corinth. His abode in this city, for some time, seems to have been without molestation. At length, however, the Jews found means to stir up an insurrection against him, and to bring him before the tribunal of the Roman president ‡. It was to the contempt which that magistrate entertained for the Jews and their controversies, of which he accounted Christianity to be one, that our Apostle owed his deliverance §.

This indefatigable teacher, after leaving Corinth, returned by Ephesus into Syria ‖; and again visited Jerusalem, and the society of Christians in that city, which, as

* Acts xvii. 1—5. † Ibid. ver. 13.
‡ Acts xviii. 12. § Ibid. ver. 15.

hath

hath been repeatedly observed, still continued the centre of the mission *. It suited not, however, with the activity of his zeal to remain long at Jerusalem. We find him going thence to Antioch, and, after some stay there, traversing once more the northern provinces of Asia Minor †. This progress ended at Ephesus; in which city, the Apostle continued in the daily exercise of his ministry two years, and until his success, at length, excited the apprehensions of those who were interested in the support of the national worship. Their clamour produced a tumult, in which he had nearly lost his life ‡. Undismayed, however, by the dangers to which he saw himself exposed, he was driven from Ephesus only to renew his labours in Greece §. After passing over Macedonia, he thence proceeded to his former station at Corinth ||. When he had formed his design of returning by a direct course from Corinth into Syria, he was compelled by a conspiracy of the Jews, who were prepared to intercept him on his way, to trace back his

* Acts xviii. 22.
† Ibid. ver. 23.
‡ Acts xix. 1. 9, 10.
§ Ibid. ver. 29. 31.

steps through Macedonia to Philippi, and thence to take shipping into Asia. Along the coast of Asia, he pursued his voyage with all the expedition he could command, in order to reach Jerusalem against the feast of Pentecost *. His reception at Jerusalem was of a piece with the usage he had experienced from the Jews in other places. He had been only a few days in that city, when the populace, instigated by some of his old opponents in Asia, who attended this feast, seized him in the temple, forced him out of it, and were ready immediately to have destroyed him, had not the sudden presence of the Roman guard rescued him out of their hands †. The officer, however, who had thus seasonably interposed, acted from his care of the public peace, with the preservation of which he was charged, and not from any favour to the Apostle, or indeed any disposition to exercise either justice or humanity towards him; for he had no sooner secured his person in the

* Acts xix. 16.

† Acts xxi. 27—33.

fortress,

fortress, than he was proceeding to examine him by torture *.

From this time to the conclusion of the history, the Apostle remains in public custody of the Roman government. After escaping assassination by a fortunate discovery of the plot, and delivering himself from the influence of his enemies by an appeal to the audience of the emperor †, he was sent, but not until he had suffered two years imprisonment, to Rome ‡. He reached Italy, after a tedious voyage, and after encountering in his passage the perils of a desperate shipwreck §. But although still a prisoner, and his fate still depending, neither the various and long-continued sufferings which he had undergone, nor the danger of his present situation, deterred him from persisting in preaching the religion; for the historian closes the account by telling us, that, for two years, he received all that came unto him in his own hired house, where he was permitted to

* Acts 22. 24. † Acts xxv. 9. 11.
‡ Acts xxiv. 27. § Acts xxvii.

dwell with a soldier that guarded him, "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence."

Now the historian, from whom we have drawn this account, in the part of his narrative which relates to Saint Paul, is supported by the strongest corroborating testimony that a history can receive. We are in possession of letters written by Saint Paul himself upon the subject of his ministry, and either written during the period which the history comprises, or, if written afterwards, reciting and referring to the transactions of that period. These letters, without borrowing from the history, or the history from them, unintentionally confirm the account which the history delivers, in a great variety of particulars. What belongs to our present purpose is the description exhibited of the Apostle's sufferings: and the representation, given in the history, of the dangers and distresses which he underwent, not only agrees, in general, with the language which he himself uses whenever he

he speaks of his life or ministry, but is also, in many instances, attested by a specific correspondency of time, place, and order of events. If the historian puts down in his narrative, that at Philippi the Apostle "was beaten with many stripes, cast into prison, and there treated with rigour and indignity *," we find him, in a letter † to a neighbouring Church, reminding his converts, that, "after he had suffered before, and was shamefully entreated at Philippi, he was bold, nevertheless, to speak unto them (to whose city he next came) the Gospel of God." If the history relate ‡, that, at Thessalonica, the house in which the Apostle was lodged, when he first came to that place, was assaulted by the populace, and the master of it dragged before the magistrate for admitting such a guest within his doors; the Apostle, in his letters to the Christians of Thessalonica, calls to their remembrance "how they had received the Gospel in much affliction §." If the history deliver an account of an insurrec-

* Acts xvi. 24.
† 1 Thess. ii. 2.
‡ Acts xvii. 57.
§ 1 Thess. i. 6.

tion

tion at Ephesus, which had nearly cost the Apostle his life, we have the Apostle himself, in a letter written a short time after his departure from that city, describing his despair, and returning thanks for his deliverance *. If the history inform us, that the Apostle was expelled from Antioch in Pisidia, attempted to be stoned at Iconium, and actually stoned at Lystra, there is preserved a letter from him to a favourite convert, whom, as the same history tells us, he first met with in these parts; in which letter he appeals to that disciple's knowledge "of the persecutions which befel him at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra †." If the history make the Apostle, in his speech to the Ephesian Elders, remind them, as one poof of the disinterestedness of his views, that, to their knowledge, he had supplied his own and the necessities of his companions by personal labour ‡; we find the same Apostle, in a letter written during his residence at Ephesus, asserting of himself, "that even

* Acts xix. 2 Cor. i. 8, 9.

† Acts xiii. 50. xix. 5. 19. 2 Tim. iii. 10, 11.

‡ Acts xx. 34.

to that hour he laboured, working with his own hands *."

These coincidences, together with many relative to other parts of the Apostle's history, and *all* drawn from independent sources, not only confirm the truth of the account, in the particular points as to which they are observed, but add much to the credit of the narrative in all its parts; and support the author's profession of being a contemporary of the person whose history he writes, and, throughout a material portion of his narrative, a companion.

What the epistles of the Apostles declare of the suffering state of Christianity, the writings which remain of their companions and immediate followers, expressly confirm.

Clement, who is honourably mentioned by Saint Paul in his epistle to the Philippians †, hath left us his attestation to this point, in the following words: "Let us take (says he) the examples of our own age.

* 1 Cor. iv. 11, 12. † Philipp. iv. 3.

Through

Through zeal and envy, the most faithful and righteous pillars of the Church have been persecuted even to the most grievous deaths. Let us set before our eyes *the holy Apostles*. Peter, by unjust envy, underwent, not one or two, but many sufferings; till at last, being martyred, he went to the place of glory that was due unto him. For the same cause did Paul, in like manner, receive the reward of his patience. Seven times he was in bonds; he was whipped, was stoned; he preached both in the East and in the West, leaving behind him the glorious report of his faith; and so having taught the whole world righteousness, and for that end travelled even unto the utmost bounds of the West, he at last suffered martyrdom by the command of the governors, and departed out of the world, and went unto his holy place, being become a most eminent pattern of patience unto all ages. To these holy Apostles, were joined a very great number of others, who, having through envy undergone, in like manner, many pains and torments, have left a glorious example to us. For this, not only men, but women have been persecuted; and, having suffered

very

very grievous and cruel punishments, have finished the course of their faith with firmness *."

Hermas, saluted by Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, in a piece very little connected with historical recitals, thus speaks: "Such as have believed and suffered death for the name of Christ, and have endured with a ready mind, and have given up their lives with all their hearts †."

Polycarp, the disciple of John, (though all that remains of his works be a very short epistle,) has not left this subject unnoticed. "I exhort (says he) all of you, that ye obey the word of righteousness, and exercise all patience, which ye have seen set forth before your eyes, not only in the blessed Ignatius, and Lorimus, and Rufus, but in others among yourselves, and in *Paul himself and the rest of the Apostles;* being confident in this, that all these have not run in vain, but in faith and righteousness; and are gone to the

* Clem. ad Cor. c. v. vi. Abp. Wake's Trans.
† Shepherd of Hermas, c. xxviii.

place

place that was due to them from the Lord, with whom also they suffered. For they loved not this present world, but Him who died and was raised again by God for us *."

Ignatius, the contemporary of Polycarp, recognizes the same topic, briefly indeed, but positively and precisely. "For this cause (*i. e.* for having felt and handled Christ's body after his resurrection, and being convinced, as Ignatius expresses it, both by his flesh and spirit), they (*i. e.* Peter, and those who were present with Peter at Christ's appearance) despised death, and were found to be above it †."

Would the reader know what a persecution in these days was, I would refer him to a circular letter, written by the Church of Smyrna soon after the death of Polycarp, who, it will be remembered, had lived with Saint John; and which letter is intitled a relation of that bishop's martyrdom. "The sufferings (say they) of all the other martyrs were blessed and generous, which they

* Pol. ad Phil. c. ix.

† 19 Ep. Smyr. c. iii.

underwent

underwent according to the will of God. For so it becomes us, who are more religious than others, to ascribe the power and ordering of all things unto him. And indeed who can choose but admire the greatness of their minds, and that admirable patience and love of their Master, which then appeared in them? Who, when they were so flayed with whipping, that the frame and structure of their bodies were laid open to their very inward veins and arteries, nevertheless endured it. In like manner, those who were condemned to the beasts, and kept a long time in prison, underwent many cruel torments, being forced to lie upon sharp spikes laid under their bodies, and tormented with divers other sorts of punishments; that so, if it were possible, the tyrant, by the length of their sufferings, might have brought them to deny Christ *."

* Rel. Mor. Pol. c. ii.

CHAPTER V.

There is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to have been original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

On the history, of which the last chapter contains an abstract, there are a few observations which it may be proper to make, by way of applying its testimony to the particular propositions for which we contend.

I. Although our Scripture history leaves the general account of the Apostles in an early part of the narrative, and proceeds with the separate account of one particular Apostle,

Apostle, yet the information which it delivers so far extends to the rest, as it shews *the nature of the service.* When we see one Apostle suffering persecution in the discharge of his commission, we shall not believe, without evidence, that the same office could, at the same time, be attended with ease and safety to others. And this fair and reasonable inference is confirmed by the direct attestation of the letters, to which we have so often referred. The writer of these letters not only alludes, in numerous passages, to his own sufferings, but speaks of the rest of the Apostles as enduring like sufferings with himself. "I think that God hath set forth *us the Apostles* last, as it were, appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men;—even unto this present hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and as the off-

scouring of all things unto this day*." Add to which, that in the short account that is given of the other Apostles, in the former part of the history, and within the short period which that account comprises, we find, first, two of them seized, imprisoned, brought before the Sanhedrim, and threatened with further punishment†; then, the whole number imprisoned and beaten‡: soon afterwards, one of their adherents stoned to death, and so hot a persecution raised against the sect, as to drive most of them out of the place; a short time only succeeding, before one of the twelve was beheaded, and another sentenced to the same fate; and all this passing in the single city of Jerusalem, and within ten years after the Founder's death, and the commencement of the institution.

II. Secondly, We take no credit at present for the miraculous part of the narrative, nor do we insist upon the correctness of single passages of it. If the whole story be not a novel, a romance; the whole ac-

* 1 Cor. iv. et seq. † Acts iv. 3. 21. ‡ Acts v. 18. 40.

tion

tion a dream; if Peter, and James, and Paul, and the rest of the Apostles mentioned in the account, be not all imaginary persons; if their letters be not all forgeries, and, what is more, forgeries of names and characters which never existed; then is there evidence in our hands sufficient to support the only fact we contend for (and which, I repeat again, is, in itself, highly probable), that the original followers of Jesus Christ exerted great endeavours to propagate his religion, and underwent great labours, dangers, and sufferings, in consequence of their undertaking.

III. The general reality of the apostolic history is strongly confirmed by the consideration, that it, in truth, does no more than assign adequate causes for effects which certainly were produced, and describe consequences naturally resulting from situations which certainly existed. The *effects* were certainly there, of which this history sets forth the cause, and origin, and progress. It is acknowledged on all hands, because it is recorded by other testimony than that of the Christians themselves, that the

the religion began to prevail at that time, and in that country. It is very difficult to conceive how it could begin, or prevail at all, without the exertions of the Founder and his followers in propagating the new persuasion. The history now in our hands describes these exertions, the persons employed, the means and endeavours made use of, and the labours undertaken in the prosecution of this purpose. Again, the treatment which the history represents the first propagators of the religion to have experienced, was no other than what naturally resulted from the situation in which they were confessedly placed. It is admitted that the religion was adverse, in a great degree, to the reigning opinions, and to the hopes and wishes of the nation to which it was first introduced; and that it overthrew, so far as it was received, the established theology and worship of every other country. We cannot feel much reluctance in believing that, when the messengers of such a system went about not only publishing their opinions, but collecting proselytes, and forming regular societies of proselytes, they should meet with opposition in their

attempts,

attempts, or that this opposition should sometimes proceed to fatal extremities. Our history details examples of this opposition, and of the sufferings and dangers, which the emissaries of the religion underwent, perfectly agreeable to what might reasonably be expected, from the nature of their undertaking, compared with the character of the age and country in which it was carried on.

IV. Fourthly: The records before us supply evidence of what formed another member of our general proposition, and what, as hath already been observed, is highly probable, and almost a necessary consequence of their new profession, viz. that, together with activity and courage in propagating the religion, the primitive followers of Jesus assumed, upon their conversion, a new and peculiar course of private life. Immediately after their Master was withdrawn from them, we hear of their "continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication *;" of their "continuing daily with one accord in the tem-

* Acts i. 14.

ple;"

ple*;" of "many being gathered together praying†." We know what strict injunctions were laid upon the converts by their teachers. Wherever they came, the first word of their preaching was, "Repent!" We know that these injunctions obliged them to refrain from many species of licentiousness, which were not, at that time, reputed criminal. We know the rules of purity, and the maxims of benevolence, which Christians read in their books; concerning which rules, it is enough to observe, that, if they were, I will not say completely obeyed, but in any degree regarded, they would produce a system of conduct, and, what is more difficult to preserve, a disposition of mind, and a regulation of affections, different from any thing to which they had hitherto been accustomed, and different from what they would see in others. The change and distinction of manners, which resulted from their new character, is perpetually referred to in the letters of their teachers. "And you hath he quickened, who *were* dead in

* Acts ii. 42. † Acts xii. 12.

trespasses

trespasses and sins, wherein in *times past* ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others *."—" For the *time past of our life* may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries; *wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot* †." Saint Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, after enumerating, as his manner was, a catalogue of vicious characters, adds, " Such *were* some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified ‡." In like manner, and alluding to the same change of practices and sentiment, he asks the Roman Christians, " what fruit they had in those things, whereof they are *now* ashamed §?" The

* Eph. ii. 1—3. See also Tit. iii. 3. † 1 Pet. iv. 3, 4.
‡ 1 Cor. vi. 11. § Rom. vi. 21.

phrases

phrases which the same writer employs to describe the moral condition of Christians, compared with their condition before they became Christians, such as "newness of life," being "freed from sin," being "dead to sin;" "the destruction of the body of sin, that, *for the future*, they should not serve sin;" "children of light and of the day," as opposed to "children of darkness and of the night;" "not sleeping as others;" imply, at least, a new system of obligation, and, probably, a new series of conduct, commencing with their conversion.

• • •

The testimony which Pliny bears to the behaviour of the new sect in his time, and which testimony comes not more than fifty years after that of Saint Paul, is very applicable to the subject under consideration. The character which this writer gives of the Christians of that age, and which was drawn from a pretty accurate enquiry, because he considered their moral principles as the point in which the magistrate was interested, is as follows:—He tells the emperor, "that some of those who had relinquished the society, or who, to save

themselves, pretended that they had relinquished it, affirmed that they were wont to meet together, on a stated day, before it was light, and sang among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ as a God; and to bind themselves, by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but that they would not be guilty of theft or robbery, or adultery; that they would never falsify their word, or deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it." This proves that a morality, more pure and strict than was ordinary, prevailed at that time in Christian societies. And to me it appears, that we are authorised to carry this testimony back to the age of the Apostles; because it is not probable that the immediate hearers and disciples of Christ were more relaxed than their successors in Pliny's time, or the missionaries of the religion than those whom they taught.

CHAPTER VI.

There is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to have been original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

When we consider, first, the prevalency of the religion at this hour; secondly, the only credible account which can be given of its origin, viz. the activity of the Founder and his associates; thirdly, the opposition which that activity must naturally have excited; fourthly, the fate of the Founder of the religion, attested by heathen writers as well as our own; fifthly, the testimony of the same writers to the sufferings of Christians, either contemporary with, or immedi-

 ately

ately succeeding, the original settlers of the institution; sixthly, predictions of the sufferings of his followers ascribed to the Founder of the religion, which ascription alone proves, either that such predictions were delivered and fulfilled, or that the writers of Christ's life were induced by the event to attribute such predictions to him; seventhly, letters now in our possession, written by some of the principal agents in the transaction, referring expressly to extreme labours, dangers, and sufferings, sustained by themselves and their companions; lastly, a history purporting to be written by a fellow-traveller of one of the new teachers, and, by its unsophisticated correspondency with letters of that person still extant, proving itself to be written by some one well acquainted with the subject of the narrative, which history contains accounts of travels, persecution, and martyrdoms, answering to what the former reasons lead us to expect: when we lay together these considerations, which, taken separately, are, I think, correctly, such as I have stated them in the preceding chapters, there cannot much doubt remain upon our minds, but that a

number

number of persons at that time appeared in the world, publicly advancing an extraordinary story, and, for the sake of propagating the belief of that story, voluntarily incurring great personal dangers, traversing seas and kingdoms, exerting great industry, and sustaining great extremities of ill usage and persecution. It is also proved, that the same persons, in consequence of their persuasion, or pretended persuasion of the truth of what they asserted, entered upon a course of life in many respects new and singular.

From the clear and acknowledged parts of the case, I think it to be likewise in the highest degree probable, that the story, for which these persons voluntarily exposed themselves to the fatigues and hardships which they endured, was a *miraculous* story; I mean, that they pretended to miraculous evidence of some kind or other. They had nothing else to stand upon. The designation of the person, that is to say, that Jesus of Nazareth, rather than any other person, was the Messiah, and as such the subject of their ministry, could only be founded upon supernatural tokens attributed to him. Here

Here were no victories, no conquests, no revolutions, no suprising elevation of fortune, no achievements of valour, of strength, or of policy, to appeal to; no discoveries in any art or science, no great efforts of genius or learning to produce. A Galilean peasant was denounced to the world as a divine lawgiver. A young man of mean condition, of a private and simple life, and who had wrought no deliverance for the Jewish nation, was declared to be their Messiah. This, without ascribing to him at the same time some proofs of his mission, (and what other but supernatural proofs could there be?) was too absurd a claim to be either imagined, or attempted, or credited. In whatever degree, or in whatever part, the religion was *argumentative*, when it came to the question, "Is the carpenter's son of Nazareth, the person whom we are to receive and obey?" there was nothing but the miracles attributed to him, by which his pretensions could be maintained for a moment. Every controversy and every question must presuppose these: for, however such controversies, when they did arise, might, and naturally would, be discussed upon their own grounds of argumentation, without

without citing the miraculous evidenc which had been asserted to attend the Founder of the religion (which would have been to enter upon another, and a more general question), yet we are to bear in mind, that without previously supposing the existence or the pretence of such evidence, there could have been no place for the discussion of the argument at all. Thus, for example, whether the prophecies, which the Jews interpreted to belong to the Messiah, were, or were not, applicable to the history of Jesus of Nazareth, was a natural subject of debate in those times; and the debate would proceed, without recurring at every turn to his miracles, because it set out with supposing these; inasmuch as without miraculous marks and tokens (real or pretended), or without some such great change effected by his means in the public condition of the country, as might have satisfied the then received interpretation of these prophecies, I do not see how the question could ever have been entertained. Apollos, we read, "mightily convinced the Jews, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ *;"

* Acts xviii. 28.

but

But unless Jesus had exhibited some distinction of his person, some proof of supernatural power, the argument from the old Scriptures could have had no place. It had nothing to attach upon. A young man calling himself the Son of God, gathering a crowd about him, and delivering to them lectures of morality, could not have excited so much as a doubt among the Jews, whether he was the object in whom a long series of ancient prophecies terminated, from the completion of which they had formed such magnificent expectations, and expectations of a nature so opposite to what appeared; I mean, no such doubt could exist when they had the whole case before them, when they saw him put to death for his officiousness, and when by his death the evidence concerning him was closed. Again, the *effect* of the Messiah's coming, supposing Jesus to have been he, upon Jews, upon Gentiles, upon their relation to each other, upon their acceptance with God, upon their duties and their expectations; his nature, authority, office, and agency; were likely to become subjects of much consideration with the early votaries of the religion, and to oc-

cupy

cupy their attention and writings. I should not however, expect, that in these disquisitions, whether preserved in the form of letters, speeches, or set treatises, frequent or very direct mention of his miracles would occur. Still miraculous evidence lay at the bottom of the argument. In the *primary* question, miraculous pretentions, and miraculous pretentions alone, were what they had to rely upon.

That the original story was miraculous, is very fairly also inferred from the miraculous powers which were laid claim to by the Christians of succeeding ages. If the accounts of these miracles be true, it was a continuation of the same powers; if they be false, it was an *imitation*, I will not say, of what had been wrought, but of what had been reported to have been wrought by those who preceded them. That imitation should follow reality; fiction should be grafted upon truth; that, if miracles were performed at first, miracles should be pretended afterwards; agrees so well with the ordinary course of human affairs, that we can have no great difficulty in believing it. The contrary supposition

supposition is very improbable, namely, that miracles should be pretended to by the followers of the Apostles and first emissaries of the religion, when none were pretended to, either in their own persons or that of their Master, by these Apostles and emissaries themselves.

CHAPTER VII.

There is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to have been original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

It being then once proved, that the first propagators of the Christian institution did exert activity, and subject themselves to great dangers and sufferings, in consequence and for the sake of an extraordinary, and, I think we may say, of a miraculous story of some kind or other; the next great question is, Whether the account, which our Scriptures contain, be that story; that which these men delivered, and for which they acted and suffered as they did?

This

This question is, in effect, no other than whether the story which Christians have *now*, be the story which Christians had *then?* And of this the following proofs may be deduced from general considerations, and from considerations prior to any enquiry into the particular reasons and testimonies by which the authority of our histories is supported.

In the first place, there exists no trace or vestige of any other story. It is not, like the death of Cyrus the Great, a competition between opposite accounts, or between the credit of different historians. There is not a document, or scrap of account, either contemporary with the commencement of Christianity, or extant within many ages after that commencement, which assigns a history substantially different from ours. The remote, brief, and incidental notices of the affair, which are found in heathen writers, so far as they do go, go along with us. They bear testimony to these facts:— that the institution originated from Jesus: that the Founder was put to death, as a malefactor, at Jerusalem, by the authority of

of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; that the religion nevertheless spread in that city, and throughout Judea; and that it was propagated thence to distant countries; that the converts were numerous; that they suffered great hardships and injuries for their profession; and that all this took place in the age of the world which our books have assigned. They go on further, to describe the *manners* of Christians, in terms perfectly conformable to the accounts extant in our books; that they were wont to assemble on a certain day; that they sang hymns to Christ as to a god; that they bound themselves by an oath not to commit any crime, but to abstain from theft and adultery, to adhere strictly to their promises, and not to deny money deposited in their hands*; that they worshipped him who was crucified in Palestine; that this their first lawgiver had taught them that

* See Pliny's Letter.—Bonnet, in his lively way of expressing himself, says;—"Comparing Pliny's Letter with the Account in the Acts, it seems to me that I had not taken up another author, but that I was still reading the historian of that extraordinary society." This is strong: but there is undoubtedly an affinity, and all the affinity that could be expected.

they

they were all brethren; that they had a great contempt for the things of this world, and looked upon them as common; that they flew to one another's relief; that they cherished strong hopes of immortality; that they despised death, and surrendered themselves to sufferings*." This is the account of writers who viewed the subject at a great distance; who were uninformed and uninterested about it. It bears the characters of such an account upon the face of it, because it describes effects, namely, the appearance in the world of a new religion, and the conversion of great multitudes to it, without descending, in the smallest degree, to the detail of the transaction upon which it was founded, the interior of the institution, the evidence or arguments offered

* "It is incredible what expedition they use when any of their friends are known to be in trouble. In a word, they spare nothing upon such an occasion;—for these miserable men have no doubt they shall be immortal, and live for ever: therefore they contemn death, and may surrender themselves to sufferings. Moreover, their first law-giver has taught them that they are all brethren, when once they have turned and renounced the gods of the Greeks, and worship this Master of theirs who was crucified, and engage to live according to his laws. They have also a sovereign contempt for all the things of this world, and look upon them as common." Lucian. de Morte Peregrini, t. i. p. 565. ed. Græv.

by those who drew over others to it. Yet still here is no contradiction of our story; no other or different story set up against it; but so far a confirmation of it, as that, in the general points on which the heathen account touches, it agrees with that which we find in our own books.

The same may be observed of the very few Jewish writers, of that and the adjoining period, which have come down to us. Whatever they omit, or whatever difficulties we may find in explaining the omission, they advance no other history of the transaction than that which we acknowledge. Josephus, who wrote his Antiquities, or History of the Jews, about sixty years after the commencement of Christianity, in a passage generally admitted as genuine, makes mention of John under the name of John the Baptist; that he was a preacher of virtue; that he baptized his proselytes; that he was well received by the people; that he was imprisoned and put to death by Herod; and that Herod lived in a criminal cohabitation with Herodias, his brother's wife *. In another pas-

* Antiq. l. xviii. cap. v. sect. 1, 2.

sage,

sage, allowed by many, although not without considerable question being moved about it, we hear of "James, the brother of him who was called Jesus, and of his being put to death*." In a third passage, extant in every copy that remains of Josephus's history, but the authenticity of which has nevertheless been long disputed, we have an explicit testimony to the substance of our history in these words:—"At that time lived Jesus, a wise man, if he may be called a man, for he performed many wonderful works. He was a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews and Gentiles. This was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men among us, had condmned him to the cross, they who before had conceived an affection for him, did not cease to adhere to him; for, on the third day, he appeared to them alive again, the divine prophets having foretold these and many wonderful things concerning him. And the sect of the Christians, so called from him, subsists

* Antiq. l. xx. cap. ix. sect. 1.

to this time*." Whatever become of the controversy concerning the genuineness of this passage; whether Josephus go the whole length of our history, which, if the passage be sincere, he does; or whether he proceed only a very little way with us, which, if the passage be rejected, we confess to be the case; still what we asserted is true, that he gives no other or different history of the subject from ours, no other or different account of the origin of the institution. And I think also that it may with great reason be contended, either that the passage is genuine, or that the silence of Josephus was *designed.* For, although we should lay aside the authority of our own books entirely, yet when Tacitus, who wrote not twenty, perhaps not ten, years, after Josephus, in his account of a period in which Josephus was nearly thirty years of age, tells us, that a vast multitude of Christians were condemned at Rome; that they derived their denomination from Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death, as a criminal, by the procurator,

* Antiq. l. xviii. cap. iii. sect. 3.

 Pontius

Pontius Pilate; that the superstition had spread not only over Judea, the source of the evil, but had reached Rome also;—when Suetonius, an historian contemporary with Tacitus, relates that, in the time of Claudius, the Jews were making disturbances at Rome, Christus being their leader; and that, during the reign of Nero, the Christians were punished; under both which emperors, Josephus lived:—when Pliny, who wrote his celebrated epistle not more than thirty years after the publication of Josephus's history, found the Christians in such numbers in the province of Bithynia, as to draw from him a complaint, that the contagion had seized cities, towns, and villages, and had so seized them as to produce a general desertion of the public rites; and when, as has already been observed, there is no reason for imagining that the Christians were more numerous in Bithynia than in many other parts of the Roman empire: it cannot, I should suppose, after this, be believed, that the religion, and the transaction upon which it was founded, were too obscure to engage the attention of Josephus, or to obtain a

place

place in his history. Perhaps he did not know how to represent the business, and disposed of his difficulties by passing it over in silence. Eusebius wrote the life of Constantine, yet omits entirely the most remarkable circumstance in that life, the death of his son Crispus; undoubtedly for the reason here given. The reserve of Josephus upon the subject of Christianity appears also in his passing over the banishment of the Jews by Claudius, which Suetonius, we have seen, has recorded with an express reference to Christ. This is at least as remarkable as his silence about the infants of Bethlehem*. Be, however, the fact, or the cause of the omission in Josephus†, what it may, no other or different

* Michaelis has computed, and, as it should seem, fairly enough, that probably not more than twenty children perished by this cruel precaution. Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament, translated by Marsh; vol. i. c. ii. sect. 11.

† There is no notice taken of Christianity in the Mishna, a collection of Jewish traditions compiled about the year 180; although it contains a Tract "De cultu peregrino," of strange or idolatrous worship: yet it cannot be disputed but that Christianity was perfectly well known in the world at this time. There is extremely little notice of the subject in the Jerusalem Talmud, compiled about the year 300, and not much more in the Babylonish Talmud, of the year 500; although

different history on the subject has been given by him, or is pretended to have been given.

But farther; the whole series of Christian writers, from the first age of the institution down to the present, in their discussions, apologies, arguments, and controversies, proceed upon the general story which our Scriptures contain, and upon no other. The main facts, the principal agents, are alike in all. This argument will appear to be of great force, when it is known that we are able to trace back the series of writers to a contact with the historical books of the New Tsstament, and to the age of the first emissaries of the religion, and to deduce it, by an unbroken continuation, from that end of the train to the present.

The remaining letters of the Apostles, (and what more original than *their* letters can we have?) though written without the

though both these works are of a religious nature, and although, when the first was compiled, Christianity was on the point of becoming the religion of the state, and, when the latter was published, had been so for 206 years.

remotest

remotest design of transmitting the history of Christ, or of Christianity, to future ages, or even of making it known to their contemporaries, incidentally disclose to us the following circumstances:—Christ's descent and family; his innocence; the meekness and gentleness of his character (a recognition which goes to the whole Gospel history); his exalted nature; his circumcision; his transfiguration; his life of opposition and suffering; his patience and resignation; the appointment of the eucharist, and the manner of it; his agony; his confession before Pontius Pilate; his stripes, crucifixion, and burial; his resurrection; his appearance after it, first to Peter, then to the rest of the Apostles; his ascension into heaven; and his designation to be the future judge of mankind;—the stated residence of the Apostles at Jerusalem; the working of miracles by the first preachers of the Gospel, who were also the hearers of Christ *;—the successful

* Heb. ii. 3. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which, at the first, began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us *by them that heard him*, God also bearing them witness, both *with signs and wonders*, and with *divers miracles*, and gifts of the Holy Ghost?" I allege this epistle

cessful propagation of the religion; the persecution of its followers; the miraculous conversion of Paul; miracles wrought by himself, and alleged in his controversies with his adversaries, and in letters to the persons amongst whom they were wrought;—finally, that MIRACLES *were the signs of an apostle* *.

In an epistle bearing the name of Barnabas, the companion of Paul, probably genuine, certainly belonging to that age, we have the sufferings of Christ, his choice of Apostles and their number, his passion, the scarlet robe, the vinegar and gall, the mocking and piercing, the casting lots for

epistle without hesitation; for, whatever doubts may have been raised about its author, there can be none concerning the age in which it was written. No epistle in the collection carries about it more indubitable marks of antiquity than this does. It speaks, for instance, throughout, of the temple as then standing, and of the worship of the temple as then subsisting.—Heb. viii. 4. "For, if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing there *are* priests that offer according to the law."—Again, Heb. xiii. 10. "We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which *serve* the tabernacle."

* Truly *the signs of an apostle* were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds." 2 Cor. xii. 12.

his

his coat *, his resurrection on the eighth (*i.e.* the first day of the week †), and the commemorative distinction of that day, his manifestation after his resurrection, and lastly his ascension. We have also his miracles generally but positively referred to in the following words: "finally teaching the people of Israel, and *doing many wonders and signs among them*, he preached to them, and shewed the exceeding great love which he bare towards them ‡."

In an epistle of Clement, a hearer of Saint Paul, although written for a purpose remotely connected with the Christian history, we have the resurrection of Christ, and the subsequent mission of the Apostles, recorded in these satisfactory terms: "The Apostles have preached to us from our Lord Jesus Christ from God: —For, having received their command, and being *thoroughly assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ*, they went

* Ep. Bar. c. vii. † Ibid. c. vi. ‡ Ibid. c. v.

abroad, publishing that the kingdom of God was at hand *. We find noticed also, the humility, yet the power of Christ †, his descent from Abraham, his crucifixion. We have Peter and Paul represented as faithful and righteous pillars of the Church; the numerous sufferings of Peter; the bonds, stripes, and stoning of Paul, and more particularly his extensive and unwearied travels.

In an epistle of Polycarp, a disciple of Saint John, though only a brief hortatory letter, we have the humility, patience, sufferings, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, together with the apostolic character of Saint Paul, distinctly recognized ‡. Of this same father we are also assured by Irenæus, that he (Irenæus) had heard him relate, "what he had received from eye-witnesses concerning the Lord, both *concerning his miracles* and his doctrine §."

* Ep. Clem. Rom. c. xlii.
† Ep. Clem. Rom. c. xvi.
‡ Pol. Ep. ad Phil. c. v. viii. ii. iii.
§ Ir. ad Flor. ap. Euseb. l. v. c. 20.

In the remaining works of Ignatius, the contemporary of Polycarp, larger than those of Polycarp, (yet, like those of Polycarp, treating of subjects in no wise leading to any recital of the Christian history,) the occasional allusions are proportionably more numerous. The descent of Christ from David, his mother Mary, his miraculous conception, the star at his birth, his baptism by John, the reason assigned for it, his appeal to the prophets, the ointment poured on his head, his sufferings under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, his resurrection, the Lord's day called and kept in commemoration of it, and the eucharist, in both its parts,—are unequivocally referred to. Upon the resurrection, this writer is even circumstantial. He mentions the Apostles' eating and drinking with Christ after he had risen, their feeling and their handling him; from which last circumstance Ignatius raises this just reflection;—"They believed, being convinced both by his flesh and spirit; for this cause, they despised death, and were found to be above it *."

* Ad Smyr. c. iii.

Quadratus,

Quadratus, of the same age with Ignatius, has left us the following noble testimony:—"The works of our Saviour were always conspicuous, for they were real; both those that were healed, and those that were raised from the dead; who were seen not only when they were healed or raised, but for a long time afterwards; not only whilst he dwelled on this earth, but also after his departure, and for a good while after it, insomuch that some of them have reached to our times *."

Justin Martyr came little more than thirty years after Quadratus. From Justin's works, which are still extant, might be collected a tolerably complete account of Christ's life, in all points agreeing with that which is delivered in our Scriptures; taken, indeed, in a great measure, from those Scriptures, but still proving that this account, and no other, was the account known and extant in that age. The miracles in particular, which form the part of Christ's history most material to be traced,

* Ap. Euseb. H. E. lib. iv. c. 3.

stand

stand fully and distinctly recognized in the following passage:—"He healed those who had been blind, and deaf, and lame from their birth; causing, by his word, one to leap, another to hear, and a third to see: and, by raising the dead, and making them to live, he induced, by his works, the men of that age to know him *.

It is unnecessary to carry these citations lower, because the history, after this time, occurs in ancient Christian writings as familiarly as it is wont to do in modern sermons;—occurs always the same in substance, and always that which our Evangelists represent.

This is not only true of those writings of Christians, which are genuine, and of acknowledged authority; but it is, in a great measure, true of *all* their ancient writings which remain; although some of these may have been erroneously ascribed to authors to whom they did not belong, or may contain false accounts, or may

* Just. Dial. cum Tryph. p. 288. ed Thirl.

appear

appear to be undeserving of credit, or never indeed to have obtained any. Whatever fables they have mixed with the narrative, they preserve the material parts, the leading facts, as we have them; and, so far as they do this, although they be evidence of nothing else, they are evidence that these points were *fixed*, were received and acknowledged by all Christians in the ages in which the books were written. At least, it may be asserted, that, in the places where we were most likely to meet with such things, if such things had existed, no reliques appear of any story substantially different from the present, as the cause, or as the pretence, of the institution.

Now that the original story, the story delivered by the first preachers of the institution, should have died away so entirely as to have left no record or memorial of its existence, although so many records and memorials of the time and transaction remain; and that another story should have stepped into its place, and gained exclusive possession of the belief

of

of all who professed themselves disciples of the institution, is beyond any example of the corruption of even oral tradition, and still less consistent with the experience of written history: and this improbability, which is very great, is rendered still greater by the reflection, that no such *change* as the oblivion of one stoty, and the substitution of another, took place in any future period of the Christian æra: Christianity hath travelled through dark and turbulent ages; nevertheless it came out of the cloud and the storm, such, in substance, as it entered in. Many additions were made to the primitive history, and these entitled to different degrees of credit; many doctrinal errors also were from time to time grafted into the public creed, but still the original story remained, and remained the same. In all its principal parts, it has been fixed from the beginning.

Thirdly; The religious rites and usages that prevailed amongst the early disciples of Christianity, were such as belonged to, and sprung out of, the narrative now in our hands; which accordancy shews, that

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it was the narrative upon which these persons acted, and which they had received from their teachers. Our account makes the Founder of the religion direct that his disciples should be baptized: we know that the first Christians were baptized. Our account makes him direct that they should hold religious assemblies: we find that they did hold religious assemblies. Our accounts make the Apostles assemble upon a stated day in the week: we find, and that from information perfectly independent of our accounts, that the Christians of the first century did observe stated days of assembling. Our histories record the institution of the rite which we call the Lord's Supper, and a command to repeat it in perpetual succession: we find, amongst the early Christians, the celebration of this rite universal. And indeed we find concurring in all the above-mentioned observances, Christian societies of many different nations and languages, removed from one another by a great distance of place and dissimilitude of situation. It is also extremely material to remark, that there is no room for insinuating that our books were

were fabricated with a studious accommodation to the usages which obtained at the time they were written; that the authors of the books found the usages established, and framed the story to account for their original. The Scripture accounts, especially of the Lord's Supper, are too short and cursory, not to say too obscure, and, in this view, deficient, to allow a place for any such suspicion*."

Amongst the proofs of the truth of our proposition, viz. that the story, which we have *now*, is, in substance, the story which the Christians had *then*, or, in other words, that the accounts in our Gospels are, as to their principal parts at least, the accounts which the Apostles and original teachers of the religion delivered, one arises from observing, that it appears by the Gospels themselves, that the story was public at the time; that the Christian community was

* The reader who is conversant in these researches, by comparing the short Scripture accounts of the Christian rites above mentioned, with the minute and circumstantial directions contained in the pretended apostolical constitutions, will see the force of this observation; the difference between truth and forgery.

already in possession of the substance and principal parts of the narrative. The Gospels were not the original cause of the Christian history being believed, but were themselves among the consequences of that belief. This is expressly affirmed by Saint Luke, in his brief, but, as I think, very important and instructive preface; "Forasmuch (says the Evangelist) as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things *which are most surely believed amongst us, even as they delivered them unto us, which, from the beginning, were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word;* it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things *wherein thou hast been instructed.*"—This short introduction testifies, that the substance of the history, which the Evangelist was about to write, was already believed by Christians; that it was believed upon the declarations of eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; that it formed the account of their religion, in which Christians were instructed; that the office which

the

the historian proposed to himself, was to trace each particular to its origin, and to fix the certainty of many things which the reader had before heard of. In Saint John's Gospel, the same point appears hence, that there are some principal facts, to which the historian refers, but which he does not relate. A remarkable instance of this kind is the *ascension*, which is not mentioned by Saint John in its place, at the conclusion of his history, but which is plainly referred to in the following words of the sixth chapter*: "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" And still more positively in the words which Christ, according to our Evangelist, spoke to Mary after his resurrection, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go unto my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God †." This can only be accounted for by the supposition, that Saint John wrote under a sense of the notoriety of Christ's ascension, amongst those by whom his book was likely

* Also John iii. 13. and xvi. 28.

† John xx. 17.

 to

to be read. The same account must also be given of Saint Matthew's omission of the same important fact. The thing was very well known, and it did not occur to the historian that it was necessary to add any particulars concerning it. It agrees also with this solution, and with no other, that neither Matthew, nor John, disposes of the person of our Lord in any manner whatever. Other intimations in Saint John's Gospel, of the then general notoriety of the story, are the following: His manner of introducing his narrative, (ch. i. ver. 15.) "John bare witness of him, and cried, saying"—evidently presupposes that his readers knew who John was. His rapid parenthetical reference to John's imprisonment, "for John was not yet cast into prison *," could only come from a writer whose mind was in the habit of considering John's imprisonment as perfectly notorious. The description of Andrew by the addition "Simon Peter's brother †," takes it for granted, that Simon Peter was well known. His name had not been mentioned before. The Evangelist's noticing ‡ the prevailing misconstruction of

* John iii. 24. † Ibid. i. 40. ‡ Ibid. xxi. 24.

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a discourse, which Christ held with the beloved Disciple, proves that the characters and the discourse were already public. And the observation which these instances afford, is of equal validity for the purpose of the present argument, whoever were the authors of the histories.

These *four* circumstances;—first, the recognition of the account in its principal parts, by a series of succeeding writers; secondly, the total absence of any account of the origin of the religion substantially different from ours; thirdly, the early and extensive prevalence of rites and institutions, which result from our account; fourthly, our account bearing, in its construction, proof that it is an account of facts, which were known and believed at the time;—are sufficient, I conceive, to support an assurance, that the story which we have now, is, in general, the story which Christians had at the beginning. I say *in general;* by which term I mean, that it is the same in its texture, and in its principal facts. For instance, I make no doubt, for the reasons above stated, but that the re-

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surrection of the Founder of the religion was always a part of the Christian story. Nor can a doubt of this remain upon the mind of any one who reflects that the resurrection is, in some form or other, asserted, referred to, or assumed, in every Christian writing, of every description, which hath come down to us.

And if our evidence stopped here, we should have a strong case to offer: for we should have to allege, that in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, a certain number of persons set about an attempt of establishing a new religion in the world: in the prosecution of which purpose, they voluntarily encountered great dangers, undertook great labours, sustained great sufferings, all *for* a miraculous story, which they published wherever they came; and that the resurrection of a dead man, whom during his life they had followed and accompanied, was a constant part of this story. I know nothing in the above statement which can, with any appearance of reason, be disputed: and I know nothing, in the history of the human species, similar to it.

CHAPTER VIII.

There is satisfactory evidence that many persons, professing to have been original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

THAT the story which we have now is, in the main, the story which the Apostles published, is, I think, nearly certain, from the considerations which have been proposed. But whether, when we come to the particulars, and the detail of the narrative, the historical books of the New Testament be deserving of credit as histories, so that a fact ought to be accounted true, because it is found in them; or whether they are entitled to be considered as representing the accounts which, true or false, the Apostles published;

published;—whether their authority, in either of these views can be trusted to, is a point which necessarily depends upon what we know of the books, and of their authors.

Now, in treating of this part of our argument, the first and most material observation upon the subject is, that such was the situation of the authors to whom the four Gospels are ascribed, that, if any one of the four be genuine, it is sufficient for our purpose. The received author of the first was an original Apostle and emissary of the Religion. The received author of the second, was an inhabitant of Jerusalem at the time, to whose house the Apostles were wont to resort, and himself an attendant upon one of the most eminent of that number. The received author of the third, was a stated companion and fellow-traveller of the most active of all the teachers of the Religion, and in the course of his travels frequently in the society of the original Apostles. The received author of the fourth, as well as of the first, was one of these Apostles. No stronger evidence of the truth of a history can arise from the situation of the historian, than what

what is here offered. The authors of all the histories lived at the time and upon the spot. The authors of two of the histories, were present at many of the scenes which they describe; eye-witnesses of the facts, ear-witnesses of the discourses; writing from personal knowledge and recollection; and, what strengthens their testimony, writing upon a subject in which their minds were deeply engaged, and in which, as they must have been very frequently repeating the accounts to others, the passages of the history would be kept continually alive in their memory. Whoever reads the Gospels (and they ought to be read for this particular purpose), will find in them not merely a general affirmation of miraculous powers, but detailed circumstantial accounts of miracles, with specifications of time, place, and persons; and these accounts many and various. In the Gospels, therefore, which bear the names of Matthew and John, these narratives, if they really proceeded from these men, must either be true, as far as the fidelity of human recollection is usually to be depended upon, that is, must be true in substance, and in their principal parts, (which is sufficient for the purpose of proving

proving a supernatural agency,) or they must be wilful and meditated falsehoods. Yet the writers who fabricated and uttered these falsehoods, if they be such, are of the number of those, who, unless the whole contexture of the Christian story be a dream, sacrificed their ease and safety in the cause, and for a purpose the most inconsistent that is possible with dishonest intentions. They were villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs without the least prospect of honour or advantage.

The Gospels which bear the name of Mark and Luke, although not the narratives of eye-witnesses, are, if genuine, removed from that only by one degree. They are the narratives of contemporary writers, of writers themselves mixing with the business; one of the two probably living in the place which was the principal scene of action; both living in habits of society and correspondence with those who had been present at the transactions which they relate. The latter of them accordingly tells us, (and with apparent sincerity, because he tells it without pretending to personal knowledge, and without claiming for his

his work greater authority than belonged to it,) that the things which were believed amongst Christians, came from those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; that he had traced accounts up to their source; and that he was prepared to instruct his reader in the certainty of the things which he related *. Very few histories lie so close to their facts; very few historians are so nearly connected with the subject of their narrative, or possess such means of authentic information, as these.

The situation of the writers applies to the *truth* of the facts which they record. But at present we use their testimony to a point somewhat short of this, namely, that the facts recorded in the Gospels, whether true or false, are the facts, and the sort of facts, which the original preachers of the

* Why should not the candid and modest preface of this historian be believed, as well as that which Dion Cassius prefixes to his Life of Commodus ? "These things and the following I write not from the report of others, but from my own knowledge and observation." I see no reason to doubt but that both passages describe truly enough the situation of the authors.

Religion

Religion alleged. Strictly speaking, I am concerned only to shew, that what the Gospels contain is the same as what the Apostles preached. Now, how stands the proof of this point? A set of men went about the world, publishing a story composed of miraculous accounts (for miraculous from the very nature and exigency of the case they must have been), and, upon the strength of these accounts, called upon mankind to quit the religions in which they had been educated, and to take up, thenceforth, a new system of opinions, and new rules of action. What is more in attestation of these accounts, that is, in support of an institution of which these accounts were the foundation, is, that the same men voluntarily exposed themselves to harassing and perpetual labours, dangers, and sufferings. We want to know what these accounts were. We have the particulars, *i. e.* many particulars, from two of their own number. We have them from an attendant of one of the number, and who, there is reason to believe, was an inhabitant of Jerusalem at the time. We have them from a fourth writer, who accompanied the most

most laborious missionary of the institution in his travels; who, in the course of these travels, was frequently brought into the society of the rest; and who, let it be observed, begins his narrative by telling us that he is about to relate the things which had been delivered by those who were ministers of the word and eye-witnesses of the fact. I do not know what information can be more satisfactory than this. We may, perhaps, perceive the force and value of it more sensibly, if we reflect how *requiring* we should have been if we had wanted it. Supposing it to be sufficiently proved, that the Religion now professed among us, owed its original to the preaching and ministry of a number of men, who, about eighteen centuries ago, set forth in the world a new system of religious opinions, founded upon certain extraordinary things which they related of a wonderful person who had appeared in Judea; suppose it to be also sufficiently proved, that, in the course and prosecution of their ministry, these men had subjected themselves to extreme hardships, fatigue, and peril; but suppose the accounts which they published

blished had not been committed to writing till some ages after their times, or at least that no histories, but what had been composed some ages afterwards, had reached our hands; we should have said, and with reason, that we were willing to believe these men under the circumstances in which they delivered their testimony, but that we did not, at this day, know with sufficient evidence what their testimony was. Had we received the particulars of it from any of their own number, from any of those who lived and conversed with them, from any of their hearers, or even from any of their contemporaries, we should have had something to rely upon. Now, if our books be genuine, we have all these. We have the very species of information which, as it appears to me, our imagination would have carved out for us, if it had been wanting.

But I have said, that, if *any one* of the four Gospels be genuine, we have not only direct historical testimony to the point we contend for, but testimony which, so far as that point is concerned, cannot reasonably be rejected. If the first Gospel was really written

written by Matthew, we have the narrative of one of the number, from which to judge what were the miracles, and the kind of miracles, which the Apostles attributed to Jesus. Although, for argument's sake, and only for argument's sake, we should allow that this Gospel had been erroneously ascribed to Matthew; yet, if the Gospel of Saint John be genuine, the observation holds with no less strength. Again, although the Gospels both of Matthew and John could be supposed to be spurious, yet, if the Gospel of Saint Luke were truly the composition of that person, or of any person, be his name what it might, who was actually in the situation in which the author of that Gospel professes himself to have been, or if the Gospel which bears the name of Mark really proceeded from him; we still, even upon the lowest supposition, possess the accounts of one writer at least, who was not only contemporary with the Apostles, but associated with them in their ministry; which authority seems sufficient, when the question is simply what it was which these Apostles advanced.

I think it material to have this well no-

ticed. The New Testament contains a great number of distinct writings, the genuineness of any one of which is almost sufficient to prove the truth of the Religion: it contains, however, four distinct histories, the genuineness of any one of which is perfectly sufficient. If, therefore, we must be considered as encountering the risk of error in assigning the authors of our books, we are entitled to the advantage of so many separate probabilities. And although it should appear that some of the Evangelists had seen and used each other's works, this discovery, whilst it subtracts indeed from their character as testimonies strictly independent, diminishes, I conceive, little, either their separate authority (by which I mean the authority of any one that is genuine), or their mutual confirmation. For, let the most disadvantageous supposition possible be made concerning them; let it be allowed, what I should have no great difficulty in admitting, that Mark compiled his history almost entirely from those of Matthew and Luke; and let it also for a moment be supposed that these histories were not, in fact, written by Matthew and Luke;

Luke; yet, if it be true that Mark, a contemporary of the Apostles, living in habits of society with the Apostles, a fellow-traveller and fellow-labourer with some of them; if, I say, it be true that this person made the compilation, it follows, that the writings from which he made it existed in the time of the Apostles, and not only so, but that they were then in such esteem and credit, that a companion of the Apostles formed a history out of them. Let the Gospel of Mark be called an epitome of that of Matthew; if a person in the situation in which Mark is described to have been, actually made the epitome, it affords the strongest possible attestation to the character of the original.

Again, parallelisms in sentences, in words, and in the order of words, have been traced out between the Gospel of Matthew and that of Luke; which concurrence cannot easily be explained otherwise than by supposing, either that Luke had consulted Matthew's history, or, what appears to me in no wise incredible, that minutes of some of Christ's discourses, as well as brief memoirs

moirs of some passages of his life, had been committed to writing at the time; and that such written accounts had by both authors been occasionally admitted into their histories. Either supposition is perfectly consistent with the acknowledged formation of Saint Luke's narrative, who professes not to write as an eye-witness, but to have investigated the original of every account which he delivers; in other words, to have collected them from such documents and testimonies, as he, who had the best opportunities of making enquiries, judged to be authentic. Therefore, allowing that this writer also, in some instances, borrowed from the Gospel which we call Matthew's, and once more allowing, for the sake of stating the argument, that that Gospel was not the production of the author to whom we ascribe it; yet still we have, in Saint Luke's Gospel, a history given by a writer immediately connected with the transaction, with the witnesses of it, with the persons engaged in it, and composed from materials which that person, thus situated, deemed to be safe sources of intelligence: in other words, whatever supposition be made concerning

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any or all the other Gospels, if Saint Luke's Gospel be genuine, we have *in it* a credible evidence of the point which we maintain.

The Gospel according to Saint John appears to be, and is on all hands allowed to be, an independent testimony, strictly and properly so called. Notwithstanding, therefore, any connection, or supposed connection, between some of the Gospels, I again repeat, what I before said, that if any one of the four be genuine, we have, in that one, strong reason, from the character and situation of the writer, to believe that we possess the accounts which the original emissaries of the Religion delivered.

II. In treating of the written evidences of Christianity, next to their separate, we are to consider their aggregate authority. Now, there is in the Evangelic history a cumulation of testimony which belongs hardly to any other history, but which our habitual mode of reading the Scriptures sometimes causes us to overlook. When a passage, in any wise relating to the history of Christ, is read to us out of the epistle of Clemens

Clemens Romanus, the epistles of Ignatius, of Polycarp, or from any other writing of that age, we are immediately sensible of the confirmation which it affords, to the Scripture account. Here is a new witness. Now, if we had been accustomed to read the Gospel of Matthew alone, and had known that of Luke only as the generality of Christians know the writings of the apostolical fathers, that is, had known that such a writing was extant and acknowledged; when we came, for the first time, to look into what it contained, and found many of the facts which Matthew recorded, recorded also there, many other facts of a similar nature added, and throughout the whole work the same general series of transactions stated, and the same general character of the person who was the subject of the history preserved, I apprehend that we should feel our minds strongly impressed by this discovery of fresh evidence. We should feel a renewal of the same sentiment in first reading the Gospel of Saint John. That of Saint Mark perhaps would strike us as an abridgement of the history with which we were already acquainted; but we should naturally

naturally reflect, that if that history was abridged by such a person as Mark, or by any person of so early an age, it afforded one of the highest possible attestations to the value of the work. This successive disclosure of proof would leave us assured, that there must have been at least some reality in a story which not one, but many, had taken in hand to commit to writing. The very existence of four separate histories would satisfy us that the subject had a foundation; and when, amidst the variety which the different information of the different writers had supplied to their accounts, or which their different choice and judgment in selecting their materials had produced, we observed many facts to stand the same in all; of these facts, at least, we should conclude, that they were fixed in their credit and publicity. If, after this, we should come to the knowledge of a distinct history, and that also of the same age with the rest, taking up the subject where the others had left it, and carrying on a narrative of the effects produced in the world by the extraordinary causes of which we had already been informed, and which

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effects subsist at this day, we should think the reality of the original story in no little degree established by this supplement. If subsequent enquiries should bring to our knowledge, one after another, letters written by some of the principal agents in the business, upon the business, and during the time of their activity and concern in it, assuming all along and recognizing the original story, agitating the questions that arose out of it, pressing the obligations which resulted from it, giving advice and directions to those who acted upon it; I conceive that we should find, in every one of these, a still further support to the conclusion we had formed. At present, the weight of this successive confirmation is, in a great measure, unperceived by us. The evidence does not appear to us what it is; for, being from our infancy accustomed to regard the New Testament as one book, we see in it only one testimony. The whole occurs to us as a single evidence; and its different parts, not as distinct attestations, but as different portions only of the same. Yet in this conception of the subject, we are certainly mistaken; for the very discrepan-

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cies amongst the several documents which form our volume, prove, if all other proof were wanting, that in their original composition they were separate, and most of them independent productions.

If we dispose our ideas in a different order, the matter stands thus:—Whilst the transaction was recent, and the original witnesses were at hand to relate it; and whilst the Apostles were busied in preaching and travelling, in collecting disciples, in forming and regulating societies of converts, in supporting themselves against opposition; whilst they exercised their ministry under the harassings of frequent persecution, and in a state of almost continual alarm, it is not probable that, in this engaged, anxious, and unsettled condition of life, they would think immediately of writing histories for the information of the public or of posterity.* But it is very

* This thought occurred to Eusebius: "Nor were the Apostles of Christ greatly concerned about the writing of books, being engaged in a more excellent ministry, which is above all human power." Eccles. Hist. l. iii. c. 24.—The same consideration accounts also for the paucity of Christian writings in the first century of its era.

probable

probable, that emergencies might draw from some of them occasional letters upon the subject of their mission, to converts, or to societies of converts, with which they were connected; or that they might address written discourses and exhortations to the disciples of the institution at large, which would be received and read with a respect proportioned to the character of the writer. Accounts in the mean time would get abroad of the extraordinary things that had been passing, written with different degrees of information and correctness. The extension of the Christian society, which could no longer be instructed by a personal intercourse with the Apostles, and the possible circulation of imperfect or erroneous narratives, would soon teach some amongst them the expediency of sending forth authentic memoirs of the life and doctrine of their Master. When accounts appeared, authorized by the name, and credit, and situation of the writers, recommended or recognized by the Apostles and first preachers of the religion, or found to coincide with what the Apostles and first preachers of the Religion had taught, other accounts would fall

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into disuse and neglect; whilst these, maintaining their reputation (as, if genuine, and well founded, they would do) under the test of time, enquiry, and contradiction, might be expected to make their way into the hands of Christians of all countries of the world.

This seems the natural progress of the business; and with this the records in our possession, and the evidence concerning them, correspond. We have remaining, in the first place, many letters of the kind above described; which have been preserved with a care and fidelity answering to the respect with which we may suppose that such letters would be received. But as these letters were not written to prove the truth of the Christian Religion, in the sense in which we regard that question; nor to convey information of facts, of which those to whom the letters were written had been previously informed; we are not to look in them for any thing more than incidental allusions to the Christian history. We are able, however, to gather from these documents various particular attestations which have

have been already enumerated; and this is a species of written evidence, as far as it goes, in the highest degree satisfactory, and in point of time perhaps the first. But for our more circumstantial information, we have, in the next place, five direct *histories*, bearing the names of persons acquainted, by their situation, with the truth of what they relate, and three of them purporting, in the very body of the narrative, to be written by such persons; of which books we know, that some were in the hands of those who were contemporaries of the Apostles, and that, in the age immediately posterior to that, they were in the hands, we may say, of every one, and received by Christians with so much respect and deference, as to be constantly quoted and referred to by them without any doubt of the truth of their accounts. They were treated, as such histories, proceeding from such authorities, might expect to be treated.' In the preface to one of our histories, we have intimations left us of the existence of some ancient accounts which are now lost. There is nothing in this circumstance that can surprize us. It was to be expected,

pected, from the magnitude and novelty of the occasion, that such accounts would swarm. When better accounts came forth, these died away. Our present histories superseded others. They soon acquired a character and established a reputation which does not appear to have belonged to any other: that, at least, can be proved concerning them, which cannot be proved concerning any other.

But to return to the point which led to these reflections. By considering our records in either of the two views in which we have represented them, we shall perceive that we possess *a collection of proofs*, and not a naked or solitary testimony; and that the written evidence is of such a kind, and comes to us in such a state, as the natural order and progress of things, in the infancy of the institution, might be expected to produce.

Thirdly. The genuineness of the historical books of the New Testament is undoubtedly a point of importance, because the strength of their evidence is augmented by

by our knowledge of the situation of their authors, their relation to the subject, and the part which they sustained in the transaction; and the testimonies which we are able to produce, compose a firm ground of persuasion, that the Gospels were written by the persons whose names they bear. Nevertheless, I must be allowed to state, that to the argument which I am endeavouring to maintain, this point is not essential; I mean, so essential as that the fate of the argument depends upon it. The question before us is, whether the Gospels exhibit the story which the Apostles and first emissaries of the Religion published, and *for* which they acted and suffered in the manner in which, for some miraculous story or other, they did act and suffer. Now let us suppose that we possessed no other information concerning these books than that they were written by early disciples of Christianity; that they were known and read during the time, or near the time, of the original Apostles of the Religion; that by Christians whom the Apostles instructed, by societies of Christians which the Apostles founded, these books were *received* (by which

which term "received," I mean that they were believed to contain authentic accounts of the transaction upon which the Religion rested, and accounts which were accordingly used, repeated, and relied upon), this reception would be a valid proof that these books, whoever were the authors of them, must have accorded with what the Apostles taught. A reception by the first race of Christians is evidence that they agreed with what the first teachers of the Religion delivered. In particular, if they had not agreed with what the Apostles themselves preached, how could they have gained credit in churches and societies which the Apostles established?"

Now the fact of their early existence, and not only of their existence but their reputation, is made out by some ancient testimonies which do not happen to specify the names of the writers: add to which, what hath been already hinted, that two out of the four Gospels contain averments in the body of the history which, though they do not disclose the names, fix the time and

and situation of the authors, viz. that one was written by an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ, the other by a contemporary of the Apostles. In the Gospel of Saint John, (xix. 35.) after describing the crucifixion, with the particular circumstance of piercing Christ's side with a spear, the historian adds, as for himself, "and he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." Again, (xxi. 24.) after relating a conversation which passed between Peter and the disciple, as it is there expressed, whom Jesus loved, it is added, "this is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things." This testimony, let it be remarked, is not the less worthy of regard, because it is, in one view, imperfect. The name is not mentioned; which, if a fraudulent purpose had been intended, would have been done. The third of our present Gospels purports to have been written by the person who wrote the Acts of the Apostles; in which latter history, or rather latter part of the same history, the author, by using in various

rious places the first person plural, declares himself to have been a contemporary of all, and a companion of one, of the original preachers of the Religion.

CHAPTER IX.

There is satisfactory evidence that many persons, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

"Of the Authenticity of the Scriptures."

NOT forgetting, therefore, what credit is due to the Evangelical History, supposing even any one of the four Gospels to be genuine; what credit is due to the Gospels, even supposing nothing to be known concerning them but that they were written by early disciples of the Religion, and received with deference by early Christian

 Churches,

Churches; more especially not forgetting what credit is due to the New Testament in its capacity of *cumulative* evidence; we now proceed to state the proper and distinct proofs, which shew not only the general value of these records, but their specific authority, and the high probability there is that they actually came from the persons whose names they bear.

There are, however, a few preliminary reflections, by which we may draw up with more regularity to the propositions upon which the close and particular discussion of the subject depends. Of which nature are the following:

I. We are able to produce a great number of ancient *manuscripts*, found in many different countries, and in countries widely distant from each other, all of them anterior to the art of printing, some certainly seven or eight hundred years old, and some which have been preserved probably above a thousand years*. We have also many

* The Alexandrian manuscript, now in the British Museum, was written probably in the fourth or fifth century.

ancient

ancient *versions* of these books, and some of them into languages which are not at present, nor for many ages have been, spoken in any part of the world. The existence of these manuscripts and versions proves that the Scriptures were not the production of any modern contrivance. It does away also the uncertainty which hangs over such publications as the works, real or pretended, of Ossian and Rowley, in which the editors are challenged to produce their manuscripts, and to show where they obtained their copies. The number of manuscripts, far exceeding those of any other book, and their wide dispersion, afford an argument, in some measure, to the senses, that the Scriptures anciently, in like manner as at this day, were more read and sought after than any other books, and that also in many different countries. The greatest part of spurious Christian writings are utterly lost, the rest preserved by some single manuscript. There is weight also in Dr. Bentley's observation, that the New Testament has suffered less injury by the errors of transcribers, than the works of any profane author of the same size and anti-

quity;

quity; that is, there never was any writing, in the preservation and purity of which the world was so interested or so careful.

II. An argument of great weight with those who are judges of the proofs upon which it is founded, and capable, through their testimony, of being addressed to every understanding, is that which arises from the style and language of the New Testament. It is just such a language as might be expected from the Apostles, from persons of their age and in their situation, and from no other persons. It is the style neither of classic authors, nor of the ancient Christian Fathers, but Greek coming from men of Hebrew origin; abounding, that is, with Hebraic and Syriac idioms, such as would naturally be found in the writings of men who used a language spoken indeed where they lived, but not the common dialect of the country. This happy peculiarity is a strong proof of the genuineness of these writings: for who should forge them? The Christian Fathers were for the most part totally ignorant of Hebrew, and therefore were not likely to insert Hebraisms

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and Syriasms into their writings. The few who had a knowledge of the Hebrew, as Justin Martyr, Origen, and Epiphanius, wrote in a language which bears no resemblance to that of the New Testament. The Nazarenes, who understood Hebrew, used chiefly, perhaps almost entirely, the Gospel of Saint Matthew, and therefore cannot be suspected of forging the rest of the Sacred Writings. The argument, at any rate, proves the antiquity of these books; that they belonged to the age of the Apostles; that they could be composed indeed in no other*.

III. Why should we question the genuineness of these books? Is it for that they contain accounts of supernatural events? I apprehend that this, at the bottom, is the real, though secret, cause of our hesitation about them; for, had the writings inscribed with the names of Matthew and John, related nothing but ordinary history, there would have been no more doubt whether these writings were theirs, than there is con-

* See this argument stated more at large in Michaelis's Introduction (Marsh's translation), vol. I. c. ii. sect. 10. from which these observations are taken.

cerning the acknowledged works of Josephus or Philo; that is, there would have been no doubt at all. Now it ought to be considered that this reason, however it may apply to the credit which is given to a writer's judgement or veracity, affects the question of genuineness very indirectly. The works of Bede exhibit many wonderful relations: but who, for that reason, doubts that they were written by Bede? The same of a multitude of other authors. To which may be added, that we ask no more for our books than what we allow to other books in some sort similar to ours: we do not deny the genuineness of the Koran: we admit that the history of Apollonius Tyanæus, purporting to be written by Philostratus, was really written by Philostratus.

IV. If it had been an easy thing in the early times of the institution to have forged Christian writings, and to have obtained currency and reception to the forgeries, we should have had many appearing in the name of Christ himself. No writings would have been received with so much avidity and

and respect as these; consequently, none afforded so great temptation to forgery. Yet have we heard but of one attempt of this sort deserving of the smallest notice, *that* in a piece of a very few lines, and so far from succeeding, I mean from obtaining acceptance and reputation, or an acceptance and reputation in any wise similar to that which can be proved to have attended the books of the New Testament, that it is not so much as mentioned by any writer of the three first centuries. The learned reader need not be informed that I mean the epistle of Christ to Abgarus, king of Edessa, found at present in the work of Eusebius *, as a piece acknowledged by him, though not without considerable doubt whether the whole passage be not an interpolation, as it is most certain, that, after the publication of Eusebius's work, this epistle was universally rejected †.

V. If

* Hist. Eccl. lib. i. c. 15.

† Augustin. A. D. 895. (De Consens. Evang. c. 34.) had *heard* that the Pagans pretended to be possessed of an epistle from Christ to Peter and Paul: but he had never seen it, and appears to doubt of the existence of any such piece, either genuine or spurious. No other ancient writer mentions it. He also, and he alone, notices, and that in order to condemn it, an epistle

V. If the ascription of the Gospels to their respective authors had been arbitrary or conjectural, they would have been ascribed to more eminent men. This observation holds concerning the three first Gospels, the reputed authors of which were enabled, by their situation, to obtain true intelligence, and were likely to deliver an honest account of what they knew, but were persons not distinguished in the history by extraordinary marks of notice or commendation. Of the Apostles, I hardly know any one of whom less is said than of Matthew, or whom the little that is said, is less calculated to magnify his character. Of Mark, nothing is said in the Gospels, and what is said of any person of that name in the Acts, and in the Epistles, in no part bestows praise or eminence upon him. The name of Luke is mentioned only in Saint Paul's Epistles *, and that very

epistle ascribed to Christ by the Manichees, A. D. 270, and a short hymn attributed to him by the Priscillianists, A. D. 378. (cont. Faust. Man. lib. xxviii. c. 4.) The lateness of the writer who notices these things, the manner in which he notices them, and, above all, the silence of every preceding writer, render them unworthy of consideration.

* Col. iv. 14. 2 Tim. iv. 11. Philem. 24.

transiently. The judgement, therefore, which assigned these writings to these authors proceeded, it may be presumed, upon proper knowledge and evidence, and not upon a voluntary choice of names.

VI. Christian writers and Christian Churches appear to have soon arrived at a very general agreement upon the subject, and that without the interposition of any public authority. When the diversity of opinion, which prevailed, and prevails among Christians in other points, is considered, their concurrence in the canon of Scripture is remarkable, and of great weight, especially as it seems to have been the result of private and free enquiry. We have no knowledge of any interference of authority in the question before the council of Laodicea in the year 363. Probably the decree of this council rather declared than regulated the public judgment, or, more properly speaking, the judgment of some neighbouring Churches; the council itself consisting of no more than thirty or forty bishops of Lydia and the adjoining countries*. Nor does its authority seem to have

* Lardner, Cred. vol. viii. p. 291. et seq.

extended

extended farther; for we find numerous Christian writers, after this time, discussing the question, "what books were entitled to be received as Scripture," with great freedom, upon proper grounds of evidence, and without any reference to the decision at Laodicea.

These considerations are not to be neglected: but of an argument concerning the genuineness of ancient writings, the substance undoubtedly and strength is ancient testimony.

This testimony it is necessary to exhibit somewhat in detail: for when Christian advocates merely tell us, that we have the same reason for believing the Gospels to be written by the Evangelists whose names they bear, as we have for believing the Commentaries to be Cæsar's, the Æneid Virgil's, or the Orations Cicero's, they content themselves with an imperfect representation. They state nothing more than what

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is true, but they do not state the truth correctly. In the number, variety, and early date of our testimonies, we far exceed all other ancient books. For one, which the most celebrated work of the most celebrated Greek or Roman writer can allege, we produce many. But then it is more requisite in our books, than in theirs, to separate and distinguish them from spurious competitors. The result, I am convinced, will be satisfactory to every fair enquirer; but this circumstance renders an enquiry necessary.

In a work, however, like the present, there is a difficulty in finding a place for evidence of this kind. To pursue the detail of proofs throughout, would be to transcribe a great part of Dr. Lardner's eleven octavo volumes: to leave the argument without proofs, is to leave it without effect; for the persuasion produced by this species of evidence depends upon a view and induction of the particulars which compose it.

The method which I propose to myself is, first, to place before the reader, in one view,

view, the propositions which comprise the several heads of our testimony, and afterwards to repeat the same propositions in so many distinct sections, with the necessary authorities subjoined to each *.

The following, then, are the allegations upon the subject, which are capable of being established by pr

I. That the historical books of the New Testament, meaning thereby the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, are quoted, or alluded to, by a series of Christian writers, beginning with those who were contemporary with the Apostles, or who immediately followed them, and proceeding in close and regular succession from their time to the present.

II. That when they are quoted, or alluded to, they are quoted or alluded to with peculiar respect, as books *sui generis*; as possessing an authority which belonged to no

* The Reader, when he has the propositions before him, will observe that the argument, if he should omit the sections, proceeds connectedly from this point.

other books, and as conclusive in all questions and controversies amongst Christians.

III. That they were, in very early times, collected into a distinct volume.

IV. That they were distinguished by appropriate names and titles of respect.

V. That they were publicly read and expounded in the religious assemblies of the early Christians.

VI. That commentaries were written upon them, harmonies formed out of them, different copies carefully collated, and versions of them made into different languages.

VII. That they were received by Christians of different sects, by many heretics as well as catholics, and usually appealed to by both sides in the controversies which arose in those days.

VIII. That the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of Saint Paul, the first Epistle of John, and the first of Peter,

Peter, were received, without doubt, by those who doubted concerning the other books which are included in our present canon.

IX. That the Gospels were attacked by the early adversaries of Christianity, as books containing the accounts upon which the Religion was founded.

X. That formal catalogues of authentic scriptures were published; in all which, our present Sacred Histories were included.

XI. That these propositions cannot be affirmed of any other books claiming to be books of scripture; by which are meant those books which are commonly called apocryphal books of the New Testament.

SECTION I.

The historical books of the New Testament, meaning thereby the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, are quoted, or alluded to by a series of Christian writers, beginning with those who were contemporary with the Apostles, or who immediately followed them, and proceeding in close and regular succession from their time to the present.

THE medium of proof stated in this proposition is, of all others, the most unquestionable, the least liable to any practices of fraud, and is not diminished by the lapse of ages. Bishop Burnet, in the History of his own Times, inserts various extracts from Lord Clarendon's History. *One* such insertion is a proof, that Lord Clarendon's History was extant at the time when Bishop Burnet wrote, that it had been read by

by Bishop Burnet, that it was received by Bishop Burnet as a work of Lord Clarendon, and also regarded by him as an authentic account of the transactions which it relates; and it will be a proof of these points a thousand years hence, or as long as the books exist. Quintilian having quoted as Cicero's *, that well-known trait of dissembled vanity;—

"Si quid est in me ingenii, Judices, quod sentio quam sit exiguum;—"

the quotation would be strong evidence, were there any doubt, that the oration, which opens with this address, actually came from Cicero's pen. These instances, however simple, may serve to point out to a reader, who is little accustomed to such researches, the nature and value of the argument.

The testimonies which we have to bring forward under this proposition, are the following

I. There is extant an epistle ascribed to

* Quint. lib. xi. c. i.

Barnabas

Barnabas*, the companion of Paul. It is quoted as the epistle of Barnabas, by Clement of Alexandria, A. D. CXCIV; by Origen, A. D. CCXXX. It is mentioned by Eusebius, A. D. CCCXV, and by Jerome, A. D. CCCXCII, as an antient work in their time bearing the name of Barnabas, and as well known and read amongst Christians, though not accounted a part of Scripture. It purports to have been written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, during the calamities which followed that disaster; and it bears the character of the age to which it professes to belong.

In this epistle, appears the following remarkable passage:—"Let us, therefore, beware lest it come upon us, *as it is written;* There are many called, few chosen." From the expression "as it is written," we infer with certainty, that, at the time when the author of this epistle lived, there was a book extant, well known to Christians, and

* Lardner, Cred. edit. 1755, vol. i. p. 23. et seq. The reader will observe from the references, that the materials of these sections are almost entirely extracted from Dr. Lardner's work;—my office consisted in arrangement and selection.

of

of authority amongst them, containing these words:—"Many are called, few chosen." Such a book is our present Gospel of Saint Matthew, in which this text is twice found *, and is found in no other book now known. There is a farther observation to be made upon the terms of the quotation. The writer of the epistle was a Jew. The phrase "it is written," was the very form in which the Jews quoted their Scriptures. It is not probable, therefore, that he would have used this phrase, and without qualification, of any books but what had acquired a kind of Scriptural authority. If the passage remarked in this ancient writing had been found in one of Saint Paul's epistles, it would have been esteemed by every one a high testimony to Saint Matthew's Gospel. It ought, therefore, to be remembered, that the writing in which it *is* found was probably by very few years posterior to those of Saint Paul.

Beside this passage, there are also in the epistle before us several others, in which

* Matt. xx. 16. xxii. 14.

the sentiment is the same with what we meet with in Saint Matthew's Gospel, and two or three in which we recognize the same words. In particular, the author of the epistle repeats the precept, "Give to every one that asketh thee*;" and saith that Christ chose as his Apostles, who were to preach the Gospel, men who were great sinners, that he might shew that he came "not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance †."

II. We are in possession of an epistle written by Clement, Bishop of Rome ‡, whom ancient writers, without any doubt or scruple, assert to have been the Clement whom Saint Paul mentions, Phil. iv. 3; "with *Clement* also, and other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life." This epistle is spoken of by the ancients as an epistle acknowledged by all; and, as Irenæus well represents its value, "written by Clement, who had seen the blessed Apostles, and conversed with them; who had the preaching of the Apostles still sounding in his ears, and their traditions before his eyes."

* Matt. v. 42. † Ib. ix. 13.

‡ Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 62. et seq.

eyes." It is addressed to the Church of Corinth: and what alone may seem almost decisive of its authenticity, Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, about the year 170, *i. e.* about eighty or ninety years after the epistle was written, bears witness, "that it had been wont to be read in that Church from ancient times."

This epistle affords, amongst others, the following valuable passages:—"Especially remembering the words of the Lord Jesus which he spake, teaching gentleness and long suffering: for thus he said *: 'Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven unto you; as you do, so shall it be done unto you; as you give, so shall it be given unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye shew kindness, so shall kindness be shewn unto you; with what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be measured to you.' By this command, and by these rules, let us esta-

* "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Matt. v. 7.—"Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given unto you." Luke vi. 37, 38.—"Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matt. vii. 2.

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blish ourselves, that we may always walk obediently to his holy words."

Again: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, for he said, 'Wo to that man by whom offences come; it were better for him that he had not been born, than that he should offend one of my elect; it were better for him that a mill-stone should be tied about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the sea, than that he should offend one of my little ones.'*"

In both these passages, we perceive the high respect paid to the words of Christ as recorded by the Evangelists; "*Remember* the words of the Lord Jesus;—by this command and by these rules let us establish ourselves, that we may always walk obediently to his holy words." We perceive also in Clement a total unconsciousness of doubt, whether these were the real words of Christ,

* Matt. xviii. 6. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the sea." The latter part of the passage in Clement agrees more exactly with Luke xvii. 2: "It were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."

which are read as such in the Gospels. This observation indeed belongs to the whole series of testimony, and especially to the most ancient part of it. Whenever any thing now read in the Gospels is met with in an early Christian writing, it is always observed to stand there as acknowledged truth, i. e. to be introduced without hesitation, doubt, or apology. It is to be observed also, that as this epistle was written in the name of the Church of Rome, and addressed to the Church of Corinth, it ought to be taken as exhibiting the judgement not only of Clement, who drew up the letter, but of these Churches themselves, at least as to the authority of the books referred to.

It may be said, that, as Clement has not used words of quotation, it is not certain that he refers to any book whatever. The words of Christ, which he has put down, he might himself have heard from the Apostles, or might have received through the ordinary medium of oral tradition. This has been said: but that no such inference can be drawn from the absence of words of quotation, is proved by the three following considerations:

siderations:—First, that Clement, in the very same manner, namely, without any mark of references, uses a passage now found in the Epistle to the Romans*; which passage, from the peculiarity of the words which compose it, and from their order, it is manifest that he must have taken from the book. The same remark may be repeated of some very singular sentiments in the epistle to the Hebrews. Secondly, that there are many sentences of Saint Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians standing in Clement's epistle without any sign of quotation, which yet certainly are quotations; because it appears that Clement had Saint Paul's epistle before him, inasmuch as in one place he mentions it in terms too express to leave us in any doubt:—"Take into your hands the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul." Thirdly, that this method of adopting words of Scripture without reference or acknowledgement, was, as will appear in the sequel, a method in general use amongst the most ancient Christian writers.—These analogies not only repel the objection, but cast the presumption on the

* Rom. i. 29.

other

other side, and afford a considerable degree of positive proof, that the words in question have been borrowed from the places of Scripture in which we now find them.

But take it if you will the other way, that Clement had heard these words from the Apostles or first teachers of Christianity; with respect to the precise point of our argument, *viz.* that the Scriptures contain what the Apostles taught, this supposition may serve almost as well.

III. Near the conclusion of the epistle to the Romans, Saint Paul, amongst others, sends the following salutation: "Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, *Hermas*, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them."

Of Hermas, who appears in this catalogue of Roman Christians as contemporary with Saint Paul, a book bearing the name, and it is most probable rightly, is still remaining. It is called the Shepherd*

* Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 111.

or Pastor of Hermas. Its antiquity is incontestable, from the quotations of it in Irenæus, A. D. 178; Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194; Tertullian, A. D. 200; Origen, A. D. 230. The notes of time extant in the epistle itself, agree with its title, and with the testimonies concerning it, for it purports to have been written during the life-time of Clement.

In this piece are tacit allusions to Saint Matthew's, Saint Luke's, and Saint John's Gospels; that is to say, there are applications of thoughts and expressions found in these Gospels, without citing the place or writer from which they were taken. In this form appear in Hermas the confessing and denying of Christ *; the parable of the seed sown †; the comparison of Christ's disciples to little children; the saying, "he that putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery ‡;" the singular expression, "having received all power from his Father," in probable allu-

* Matt. x. 32, 33. or Luke xii. 8, 9.
† Matt. xiii. 3. or Luke viii. 5.
‡ Luke xvi. 18.

sion

sion to Matt. xxviii. 18; and Christ being the "gate," or only way of coming "to God," in plain allusion to John xiv. 6. x. 7. 9. There is also a probable allusion to Acts v. 32.

This piece is the representation of a vision, and has by many been accounted a weak and fanciful performance. I therefore observe, that the character of the writing has little to do with the purpose for which we adduce it. It is the age in which it was composed that gives the value to its testimony.

IV. Ignatius, as it is testified by ancient Christian writers, became Bishop of Antioch about thirty-seven years after Christ's ascension; and therefore, from his time, and place, and station, it is probable that he had known and conversed with many of the Apostles. Epistles of Ignatius are referred to by Polycarp, his contemporary. Passages found in the epistles now extant under his name, are quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178; by Origen, A. D. 230: and the occasion of writing the epistles is given at large

large by Eusebius and Jerome. What are called the smaller epistles of Ignatius, are generally deemed to be those which were read by Irenæus, Origen, and Eusebius *.

In these epistles are various undoubted allusions to the Gospels of Saint Matthew and Saint John; yet so far of the same form with those in the preceding articles, that, like them, they are not accompanied with marks of quotation.

Of these allusions the following are clear specimens:

Matt.† "Christ was baptized of John, that *all righteousness might be fulfilled by him*."
"*Be ye wise as serpents* in all things, and *harmless as a dove*."

* Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 147.

† Chap. iii. 15. "For thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness."

Chap. xi. 16. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

"Yet

John*. "Yet the Spirit is not deceived, being from God: for it knows *whence it comes, and whither it goes*."

"He (Christ) is the *door* of the Father, by which *enter in* Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the Apostles, and the Church."

As to the manner of quotation, this is observable:—Ignatius, in one place, speaks of Saint Paul in terms of high respect, and quotes his epistle to the Ephesians by *name*; yet, in several other places, he borrows words and sentiments from the same epistle without mentioning it: which shews, that this was his general manner of using and applying writings then extant, and then of high authority.

V. Polycarp † had been taught by the Apostles;

* Chap. iii. 8. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell *whence it cometh and whither it goeth*; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Chap. x. 9. "I am the door; by me if any man enter *in*, he shall be saved."

† Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 192.

Apostles; had conversed with many who had seen Christ; was also by the Apostles appointed Bishop of Smyrna." This testimony concerning Polycarp is given by Irenæus, who in his youth had seen him:—"I can tell the place," saith Irenæus, "in which the blessed Polycarp sat and taught, and his going out and coming in, and the manner of his life, and the form of his person, and the discourses he made to the people, and how he related his conversation with John, and others who had seen the Lord, and how he related their sayings, and what he had heard concerning the Lord, both concerning his miracles and his doctrine, as he had received them from the eye-witnesses of the word of life: all which Polycarp related agreeable to the Scriptures."

Of Polycarp, whose proximity to the age and country and persons of the Apostles is thus attested, we have one undoubted epistle remaining. And this, though a short letter, contains nearly forty clear allusions to books of the New Testament; which is strong evidence of the respect which Christians of that age bore for these books.

Amongst

Amongst these, although the writings of Saint Paul are more frequently used by Polycarp than any other parts of Scripture, there are copious allusions to the Gospel of Saint Matthew, some to passages found in the Gospels both of Matthew and Luke, and some which more nearly resemble the words in Luke.

I select the following, as fixing the authority of the Lord's prayer, and the use of it amongst the primitive Christians: "If therefore we *pray* the Lord, that *he will forgive us, we ought also to forgive.*"

"With supplication *beseeching* the all-seeing God *not to lead us into temptation.*"

And the following, for the sake of repeating an observation already made, that words of our Lord, found in our Gospels, were at this early day quoted as spoken by him; and not only so, but quoted with so little question or consciousness of doubt, about their being really his words, as not even to mention, much less to canvass, the authority from which they were taken:

"But

"But remembering what the Lord said, teaching, Judge not, that ye be not judged; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again *."

Supposing Polycarp to have had these words from the books in which we now find them, it is manifest that these books were considered by him, and, as he thought, considered by his readers, as authentic accounts of Christ's discourses; and that that point was incontestable.

The following is a decisive, though what we call a tacit, reference to Saint Peter's speech in the Acts of the Apostles:—"whom God hath raised, having loosed the pains of death †."

VI. Papias ‡, a hearer of John, and companion of Polycarp, as Irenæus attests, and of that age as all agree, in a passage quoted by Eusebius, from a work now lost, ex-

pressly

pressly ascribes the respective Gospels to Matthew and Mark; and in a manner which proves that these Gospels must have publicly borne the names of these authors at that time, and probably long before; for Papias does not say that one Gospel was written by Matthew, and another by Mark; but, assuming this as perfectly well known, he tells us from what materials Mark collected his account, *viz.* from Peter's preaching, and in what language Matthew wrote, *viz.* in Hebrew. Whether Papias was well informed in this statement, or not; to the point from which I produce this testimony, namely, that these books bore these names at this time, his authority is complete.

The writers hitherto alleged, had all lived and conversed with some of the Apostles. The works of theirs which remain, are in general very short pieces, yet rendered extremely valuable by their antiquity; and none, short as they are, but what contain some important testimony to our historical Scriptures *.

VII. Not

* That the quotations are more thinly strown in these, than in the writings of the next and of succeeding ages, is in

VII. Not long after these, that is, not much more than twenty years after the last, follows Justin Martyr*. His remaining works are much larger than any that have yet been noticed. Although the nature of his two principal writings, one of which was addressed to heathens, and the other was a conference with a Jew, did not lead him to such frequent appeals to Christian books, as would have appeared in a discourse intended for Christian readers; we nevertheless reckon up in them between twenty and thirty quotations of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, certain, distinct, and copious: if each verse be counted separately, a much greater

in a good measure accounted for by the observation, that the Scriptures of the New Testament had not *yet*, nor by their recency hardly could have, become a general part of Christian education; read as the Old Testament was by Jews and Christians from their childhood, and thereby intimately mixing, as that had long done, with all their religious ideas, and with their language upon religious subjects. In process of time, and as soon perhaps as could be expected, this came to be the case. And then we perceive the effect, in a proportionably greater frequency, as well as copiousness of allusion †.

* Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 258.

number;

number; if each expression, a very great one *.

We meet with quotations of three of the Gospels within the compass of half a page: "And in other words he says, Depart from me into outer darkness, which the Father hath prepared for Satan and his angels," (which is from Matthew xxv. 41). "And again he said in other words, I give unto you power to tread upon serpents, and scorpions, and venomous beasts, and upon all the power of the enemy." (This from Luke x. 19.) "And before he was crucified, he said, The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the Scribes and Pharisees, and be crucified, and rise again the third day." (This from Mark viii. 31.)

In another place, Justin quotes a passage in the history of Christ's birth, as delivered by Matthew and John, and fortifies his quotation by this remarkable testimony:

* "He cites our present canon, and particularly our four Gospels, continually, I dare say, above two hundred times." Jones's New and Full Method. Append, vol. i. p. 589. ed. 1726.

"as they have taught, who have written the history of all things concerning our Saviour Jesus Christ; and we believe them."

Quotations also are found from the Gospel of Saint John.

What, moreover, seems extremely material to be observed is, that in all Justin's works, from which might be extracted almost a complete life of Christ, there are but two instances, in which he refers to any thing as said or done by Christ, which is not related concerning him in our present Gospels: which shews, that these Gospels, and these, we may say, alone, were the authorities from which the Christians of that day drew the information upon which they depended. One of these instances is of a saying of Christ, not met with in any book now extant*. The other, of a circumstance in Christ's

* "Wherefore also our Lord Jesus Christ has said, In whatsoever I shall find you, in the same I will also judge you." Possibly Justin designed not to quote any text, but to represent the sense of many of our Lord's sayings. Fabricius has observed, that this saying has been quoted by many writers, and that

Christ's baptism, namely, a fiery or luminous appearance upon the water, which, according to Epiphanius, is noticed in the Gospel of the Hebrews: and which might be true: but which, whether true or false, is mentioned by Justin, with a plain mark of diminution when compared with what he quotes as resting upon Scripture authority. The reader will advert to this distinction; "and then, when Jesus came to the river Jordan, where John was baptizing, as Jesus descended into the water, a fire also was kindled in Jordan; and when he came up out of the water, *the Apostles of this our Christ have written*, that the Holy Ghost lighted upon him as a dove."

that Justin is the only one who ascribes it to our Lord, and that perhaps by a slip of his memory.

Words resembling these are read repeatedly in Ezekiel; "I will judge them according to their ways;" (chap. vii. 3. xxxiii. 20). It is remarkable that Justin had but just before expressly quoted Ezekiel. Mr. Jones upon this circumstance founded a conjecture, that Justin wrote only "the Lord hath "said," intending to quote the words of God, or rather the sense of those words, in Ezekiel; and that some transcriber, imagining these to be the words of Christ, inserted in his copy the addition "Jesus Christ." Vol. i. p. 539.

 All

All the references in Justin are made without mentioning the author; which proves that these books were perfectly notorious, and that there were no other accounts of Christ then extant, or, at least, no others so received and credited as to make it necessary to distinguish these from the rest.

But although Justin mentions not the author's name, he calls the books, "Memoirs composed by the Apostles;" "Memoirs composed by the Apostles and their Companions;" which descriptions, the latter especially, exactly suit with the titles which the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles now bear.

VIII. Hegesippus* came about thirty years after Justin. His testimony is remarkable only for this particular; that he relates of himself, that, travelling from Palestine to Rome, he visited, on his journey, many bishops; and that "in every succession, and in every city, the same doctrine is taught, which the Law, and the Prophets, and the *Lord* teacheth." This is an important attestation, from good authority, and of high antiquity.

* Lardner, Cred. vol. i. 314.

antiquity. It is generally understood that by the word "Lord," Hegesippus intended some writing or writings, containing the teaching of Christ, in which sense alone the term combines with the other terms "Law and Prophets," which denote writings; and together with them admits of the verb "preacheth" in the present tense. Then, that these writings were some or all of the books of the New Testament, is rendered probable from hence, that in the fragments of his works, which are preserved in Eusebius, and in a writer of the ninth century, enough, though it be little, is left to shew, that Hegesippus expressed divers things in the style of the Gospels, and of the Acts of the Apostles; that he referred to the history in the second chapter of Matthew, and recited a text of that Gospel as spoken by our Lord.

IX. At this time, viz. about the year 170, the Churches of Lyons and Vienne, in France, sent a relation of the sufferings of their martyrs to the Churches of Asia and Phrygia*. The epistle is preserved entire

* Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 332.

by

by Eusebius. And what carries in some measure the testimony of these Churches to a higher age, is, that they had now for their bishop, Pothinus, who was ninety years old, and whose early life consequently must have immediately joined on with the times of the Apostles. In this epistle are exact references to the Gospels of Luke and John, and to the Acts of the Apostles; the form of reference the same as in all the preceding articles. That from Saint John is in these words: "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the Lord, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service *."

X. The evidence now opens upon us full and clear. Irenæus † succeeded Pothinus as bishop of Lyons. In his youth, he had been a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John. In the time in which he lived, he was distant not much more than a century from the publication of the Gospels; in his instruction, only by one step separated from the persons of the Apostles. He asserts of himself and his contempora-

* John xvi. 2.

† Lardner, vol. i. p. 344.

ries,

ries, that they were able to reckon up, in all the principal Churches, the succession of bishops from the first*. I remark these particulars concerning Irenæus with more formality than usual; because the testimony which this writer affords to the historical books of the New Testament, to their authority, and to the titles which they bear, is express, positive, and exclusive. One principal passage, in which this testimony is contained, opens with a precise assertion of the point which we have laid down as the foundation of our argument, viz. that the story which the Gospels exhibit, is the story which the Apostles told. "We have not received," saith Irenæus, "the knowledge of the way of our salvation by any others than those by whom the Gospel has been brought to us.' Which Gospel they first preached, and afterwards, by the will of God, committed to writing, that it might be for time to come, the foundation and pillar of our faith.—For after that our Lord rose from the dead, and they (the Apostles) were en-

* Adv. Hæres. l. iii. c. 3.

dowed

dowed from above with the power of the Holy Ghost coming down upon them, they received a perfect knowledge of all things. They then went forth to all the ends of the earth, declaring to men the blessing of heavenly peace, having all of them, and every one alike, the Gospel of God. Matthew then, among the Jews, writ a Gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel at Rome, and founding a Church there: and after their exit, Mark also, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, delivered to us in writing the things that had been preached by Peter: and Luke, the companion of Paul, put down in a book the Gospel preached by him (Paul). Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon his breast, he likewise published a Gospel while he dwelt at Ephesus in Asia." If any modern divine should write a book upon the genuineness of the Gospels, he could not assert it more expressly, or state their original more distinctly, than Irenæus hath done within little more than a hundred years after they were published.

The

The correspondency, in the days of Irenæus, of the oral and written tradition, and the deduction of the oral tradition through various channels from the age of the Apostles, which was then lately passed, and, by consequence, the probability that the books truly delivered what the Apostles taught, is inferred also with strict regularity from another passage of his works. "The tradition of the Apostles (this Father saith) hath spread itself over the whole universe; and all they, who search after the sources of truth, will find this tradition to be held sacred in every Church. We might enumerate all those who have been appointed bishops to these churches by the Apostles, and all their successors, up to our days. It is by this uninterrupted succession that we have received the tradition which actually exists in the Church, as also the doctrines of truth, as it was preached by the Apostles *." The reader will observe upon this, that the same Irenæus, who is now stating the strength and uniformity of the tradition, we have before

* Iren. in Hær. l. iii. c. 3.

seen

seen recognizing, in the fullest manner, the authority of the written records; from which we are entitled to conclude, that they were then conformable to each other.

I have said, that the testimony of Irenæus in favour of our Gospels is *exclusive* of all others. I allude to a remarkable passage in his works, in which, for some reasons sufficiently fanciful, he endeavours to shew, that there could be neither more nor fewer Gospels than *four*. With his argument we have no concern. The position itself proves that four, and only four, Gospels were at that time publicly read and acknowledged. That these were our Gospels, and in the state in which we now have them, is shown from many other places of this writer beside that which we have already alleged. He mentions how Matthew begins his Gospel, how Mark begins and ends his, and their supposed reasons for so doing. He enumerates at length the several passages of Christ's history in Luke, which are not found in any of the other Evangelists. He states the particular design with which Saint John composed his Gospel, and accounts for

for the doctrinal declarations which precede the narrative.

To the book of the Acts of the Apostles, its author and credit, the testimony of Irenæus is no less explicit. Referring to the account of Saint Paul's conversion and vocation, in the ninth chapter of that book, "Nor can they (says he, meaning the parties with whom he argues) shew that he is not to be credited, who has related to us the truth with the greatest exactness." In another place, he has actually collected the several texts, in which the writer of the history is represented as accompanying Saint Paul; which leads him to deliver a summary of almost the whole of the last twelve chapters of the book.

In an author thus abounding with references and allusions to the Scriptures, there is not one to any apocryphal Christian writing whatever. This is a broad line of distinction between our Sacred Books and the pretensions of all others.

The force of the testimony of the pe-

riod which we have considered, is greatly strengthened by the observation, that it is the testimony, and the concurring testimony, of writers who lived in countries remote from one another. Clement flourished at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Justin Martyr in Syria, and Irenæus in France.

XI. Omitting Athenagoras and Theophilus, who lived about this time *; in the remaining works of the former of whom are clear references to Mark and Luke; and in the works of the latter, who was bishop of Antioch, the sixth in succession from the Apostles, evident allusions to Matthew and John, and probable allusions to Luke (which, considering the nature of the compositions, that they were addresed to heathen readers, is as much as could be expected); observing also, that the works of two learned Christian writers of the same age, Miltiades and Pantænus †, are now lost; of which Miltiades, Eusebius records, that his writings "were monuments of zeal

* Lard vol. i. p. 400.—Ib. 422.

† Lard. vol. i. p. 413. 450.

for the divine oracles :" and which Pantænus, as Jerome testifies, was a man of prudence and learning, both in the Divine Scriptures and secular literature, and had left many commentaries upon the Holy Scriptures then extant: passing by these without further remark, we come to one of the most voluminous of ancient Christian writers, Clement of Alexandria *. Clement followed Irenæus at the distance of only sixteen years, and therefore may be said to maintain the series of testimony in an uninterrupted continuation.

In certain of Clement's works, now lost, but of which various parts are recited by Eusebius, there is given a distinct account of the order in which the four Gospels were written. The Gospels, which contain the genealogies, were (he says) written first; Mark's next, at the instance of Peter's followers; and John's the last: and this account he tells us that he had received from Presbyters of more ancient times. This testimony proves the following points; that these Gospels were the histories of Christ

* Lardn. vol. ii. p. 469.

then

then publicly received, and relied upon; and that the dates, occasions, and circumstances, of their publication were at that time subjects of attention and enquiry amongst Christians. In the works of Clement which remain, the four Gospels are repeatedly quoted by the names of their authors, and the Acts of the Apostles is expressly ascribed to Luke. In one place, after mentioning a particular circumstance, he adds these remarkable words: * "We have not this passage *in the four Gospels delivered to us*, but in that according to the Egyptians;" which puts a marked distinction between the four Gospels and all other histories, or pretended histories, of Christ. In another part of his works, the perfect confidence, with which he received the Gospels, is signified by him in these words: "That this is true, appears from hence, that it is written in the Gospel according to Saint Luke;" and again, "I need not use many words, but only to allege the evangelic voice of the Lord." His quotations are numerous. The sayings of Christ, of which he alleges many, are all taken from our Gospels; the single exception to this observation appearing to be a

loose

loose* quotation of a passage in Saint Matthew's Gospel.

XII. In the age in which they lived †, Tertullian joins on with Clement. The number of the Gospels then received, the names of the Evangelists, and their proper descriptions, are exhibited by this writer in one short sentence:—"Among the *Apostles*, John and Matthew teach us the faith; among *apostolical men*, Luke and Mark refresh it." The next passage to be taken from Tertullian, affords as complete an attestation to the authenticity of our books, as can be well imagined. After enumerating the Churches which had been founded by Paul, at Corinth, in Galatia, at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Ephesus; the Church of Rome established by Peter and

* "Ask great things, and the small shall be added unto you." Clement rather chose to expound the words of Matthew (chap. vi. 33.) than literally to cite them; and this is most undeniably proved by another place in the same Clement, where he both produces the text and these words as an exposition:—"Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, for these are the great things: but the small things, and things relating to this life, shall be added unto you." Jones's New and Full Method, vol. i. p. 553.

† Lardner, vol. ii. p. 561.

2 Paul,

Paul, and other Churches derived from John; he proceeds thus:—"I say then, that with them, but not with them only which are apostolical, but with all who have fellowship with them in the same faith, is that Gospel of Luke received from its first publication, which we so zealously maintain:" and presently afterwards adds; "The same authority of the apostolical Churches will support the other Gospels, which we have from them and according to them, I mean John's and Matthew's; although that likewise, which Mark published, may be said to be Peter's, whose interpreter Mark was." In another place, Tertullian affirms, that the three other Gospels were in the hands of the Churches from the beginning, as well as Luke's. This noble testimony fixes the universality with which the Gospels were received, and their antiquity; that they were in the hands of all, and had been so from the first. And this evidence appears not more than one hundred and fifty years after the publication of the books. The reader must be given to understand that, when Tertullian speaks of maintaining or defending (*tuendi*) the Gospel of Saint Luke, he only

means

means maintaining or defending the integrity of the copies of Luke received by Christian Churches, in opposition to certain curtailed copies used by Marcion against whom he writes.

This author frequently cites the Acts of the Apostles under that title, once calls it Luke's commentary, and observes how Saint Paul's epistles confirm it.

After this general evidence, it is unnecessary to add particular quotations. These, however, are so numerous and ample, as to have led Dr. Lardner to observe, "that there are more, and larger quotations of the small volume of the New Testament in this one Christian author, than there are of all the works of Cicero in writers of all characters for several ages*."

Tertullian quotes no Christian writing as of equal authority with the Scriptures, and no spurious book at all; a broad line of distinction, we may once more observe, between our Sacred Books and all others.

* Lard. vol. ii. p. 647.

We

We may again likewise remark the wide extent through which the reputation of the Gospels, and of the Acts of the Apostles, had spread, and the perfect consent in this point, of distant and independent societies. It is now only about one hundred and fifty years since Christ was crucified; and within this period, to say nothing of the apostolical Fathers who have been noticed already, we have Justin Martyr at Neapolis, Theophilus at Antioch, Irenæus in France, Clement at Alexandria, Tertullian at Carthage, quoting the same books of historical Scriptures, and, I may say, quoting these alone.

XIII. An interval of only thirty years, and that occupied by no small number of Christian writers *, whose works only remain in fragments and quotations, and in every one of which is some reference or other to the Gospels (and in one of them, Hippolytus, as preserved in Theodoret, is an abstract of the whole Gospel history),

* Minucius Felix, Apollonius, Caius, Asterius, Urbanus, Alexander bishop of Jerusalem, Hippolytus, Ammonius, Julius Africanus.

brings

brings us to a name of great celebrity in Christian antiquity, Origen* of Alexandria, who, in the quantity of his writings, exceeded the most laborious of the Greek and Latin authors. Nothing can be more peremptory upon the subject now under consideration, and, from a writer of his learning and information, more satisfactory, than the declaration of Origen, preserved, in an extract from his works, by Eusebius; "That the four Gospels alone are received without dispute by the whole Church of God under heaven:" to which declaration is immediately subjoined, a brief history of the respective authors, to whom they were then, as they are now, ascribed. The language holden concerning the Gospels throughout the works of Origen which remain, entirely correspond with the testimony here cited. His attestation to the Acts of the Apostles is no less positive: "And Luke also once more sounds the trumpet relating the Acts of the Apostles." The universality with which the Scriptures were then read, is well signified by this wri-

* Lard. vol. iii. p. 234.

ter, in a passage in which he has occasion to observe against Celsus, "That it is not in any private books, or such as are read by a few only, and those studious persons, but in books read by every body, that it is written, the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by things that are made." It is to no purpose to single out quotations of Scripture from such a writer as this. We might as well make a selection of the quotations of Scripture in Dr. Clarke's sermons. They are so thickly sown in the works of Origen, that Dr. Mill says, "If we had all his works remaining, we should have before us almost the whole text of the Bible *."

Origen notices, in order to censure, certain apocryphal Gospels. He also uses four writings of this sort; that is, throughout his large works he once or twice, at the most, quotes each of the four; but always with some mark, either of direct reprobation, or of caution to his readers, manifestly esteeming them of little or no authority.

* Mill, Proleg. cap. vi. p. 66.

XIV. Gre-

XIV. Gregory bishop of Neocesarea, and Dionysius of Alexandria, were scholars of Origen. Their testimony, therefore, though full and particular, may be reckoned a repetition only of his. The series, however, of evidence, is continued by Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, who flourished within twenty years after Origen. "The Church (says this Father) is watered, like Paradise, by four rivers, that is, by four Gospels. The Acts of the Apostles is also frequently quoted by Cyprian under that name, and under the name of the "Divine Scriptures."* In his various writings are such constant and copious citations of Scripture, as to place this part of the testimony beyond controversy. Nor is there, in the works of this eminent African bishop, one quotation of a spurious or apocryphal Christian writing.

XV. Passing over a crowd * of writers following Cyprian* at different distances,

* Novatus, Rome, A. D. 251 ; Dionysius, Rome, A. D. 259 ; Commodian, A. D. 270 , Anatolius, Laodicea, A D. 270 ; Theognostus, A. D. 282 ; Methodius, Lycia, A. D. 290 ; Phileas, Egypt, A. D. 296.

 but

but all within forty years of his time; and who all, in the imperfect remains of their works, either cite the historical Scriptures of the New Testament, or speak of them in terms of profound respect; I single out Victorin, bishop of Pettaw in Germany, merely on account of the remoteness of his situation from that of Origen and Cyprian, who were Africans; by which circumstance, his testimony, taken in conjunction with theirs, proves, that the Scripture histories, and the same histories, were known and received from one side of the Christian world to the other. This bishop* lived about the year 290: and in a commentary upon this text of the Revelations, "The first was like a lion, the second was like a calf, the third like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle," he makes out that by the four creatures are intended the four Gospels; and, to shew the propriety of the symbols, he recites the subject with which each Evangelist opens his history. The explication is fanciful, but the testimony positive. He also expressly cites the Acts of the Apostles.

* Lard. vol. v. p. 214.

XVI. Ar-

XVI. Arnobius and Lactantius *, about the year 300, composed formal arguments upon the credibility of the Christian Religion. As these arguments were addressed to Gentiles, the authors abstain from quoting Christian books *by name;* one of them giving this very reason for his reserve: but when they come to state, for the information of their readers, the outlines of Christ's history, it is apparent that they draw their accounts from our Gospels, and from no other sources; for these statements exhibit a summary of almost every thing which is related of Christ's actions and miracles by the four Evangelists. Arnobius vindicates, without mentioning their names, the credit of these historians; observing, that they were eye-witnesses of the facts which they relate, and that their ignorance of the arts of composition was rather a confirmation of their testimony, than an objection to it. Lactantius also argues in defence of the religion, from the consistency, simplicity, disinterestedness, and sufferings of the Christian historians, meaning by that term our Evangelists.

* Lard. vol. vii. p. 43. 201.

XVII. We

XVII. We close the series of testimonies with that of Eusebius *, bishop of Cæsarea, who flourished in the year 315, contemporary with, or posterior only by fifteen years to, the two authors last cited. This voluminous writer, and most diligent collector of the writings of others, beside a variety of large works, composed a history of the affairs of Christianity from its origin to his own time. His testimony to the Scriptures is the testimony of a man much conversant in the works of Christian authors, written during the three first centuries of its æra; and who had read many which are now lost. In a passage of his evangelical demonstration, Eusebius remarks, with great nicety, the delicacy of two of the Evangelists, in their manner of noticing any circumstance which regarded themselves, and of Mark, as writing under Peter's direction, in the circumstances which regarded him. The illustration of this remark leads him to bring together long quotations from each of the Evangelists; and the whole passage is a proof, that Eusebius, and the Christians

* Lard. vol. viii, p. 33.

of those days, not only read the Gospels, but studied them with attention and exactness. In a passage of his Ecclesiastical History, he treats, in form, and at large, of the occasions of writing the four Gospels, and of the order in which they were written. The title of the chapter is, "Of the Order of the Gospels;" and it begins thus: "Let us observe the writings of this Apostle John, which are not contradicted by any: and, first of all, must be mentioned, as acknowledged by all, the Gospel according to him, well known to all the Churches under heaven; and that it has been justly placed by the ancients the fourth in order, and after the other three, may be made evident in this manner."— Eusebius then proceeds to shew that John wrote the last of the four, and that his Gospel was intended to supply the omissions of the others; especially in the part of our Lord's ministry, which took place before the imprisonment of John the Baptist. He observes, "that the Apostles of Christ were not studious of the ornaments of composition, nor indeed forward to write at all, being wholly occupied with their ministry."

This

This learned author makes no use at all of Christian writings, forged with the names of Christ's Apostles, or their companions.

We close this branch of our evidence here, because, after Eusebius, there is no room for any question upon the subject; the works of Christian writers being as full of texts of Scripture, and of references to Scripture, as the discourses of modern divines. Future testimonies to the books of Scripture could only prove that they never lost their character or authority.

SECTION II.

When the Scriptures are quoted, or alluded to, they are quoted with peculiar respect, as books sui generis; *as possessing an authority which belonged to no other books, and as conclusive in all questions and controversies amongst Christians.*

Beside the general strain of reference and quotation, which uniformly and strongly indicates this distinction, the following may be regarded as specific testimonies:

I. Theophilus*, bishop of Antioch, the sixth in succession from the Apostles, and who flourished little more than a century after the books of the New Testament were written, having occasion to quote one of our Gospels, writes thus: "These things

* Lard. Cred. part ii. vol. i. p. 429.

 the

the Holy Scriptures teach us, and all who were moved by the Holy Spirit, among whom John says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Again: "Concerning the righteousness which the law teaches, the like things are to be found in the Prophets and the *Gospels*, because that all, being inspired, spoke by one and the same Spirit of God *." No words can testify more strongly than these do, the high and peculiar respect in which these books were holden.

II. A writer against Artemon †, who may be supposed to come about one hundred and fifty-eight years after the publication of the Scriptures, in a passage quoted by Eusebius, uses these expressions: "Possibly what they (our adversaries) say, might have been credited, *if first of all* the Divine Scriptures did not contradict them; *and then* the writings of certain brethren more ancient than the times of Victor." The brethren mentioned by name, are Justin, Miltiades, Tatian,

* Lard. Cred. vol. i. p. 448.

† Ib. vol. iii. p. 40.

Clement,

Clement, Irenæus, Melito, with a general appeal to many more not named. This passage proves, first, that there was at that time a collection called *Divine Scriptures*; secondly, that these Scriptures were esteemed of higher authority than the writings of the most early and celebrated Christians.

III. In a piece ascribed to Hippolytus *, who lived near the same time, the author professes, in giving his correspondent instruction in the things about which he enquires, "to draw out of the *sacred fountain*, and to set before him from the Sacred Scriptures, what may afford him satisfaction." He then quotes immediately Paul's epistles to Timothy, and afterwards many books of the New Testament. This preface to the quotations carries in it a marked distinction between the Scriptures and other books.

IV. "*Our* assertions and discourses," saith Origen †, "are unworthy of credit; we

* Lard. Cred. vol. iii. p. 112. † Ib. p. 287, 288, 289.

must

must receive the *Scriptures* as witnesses." After treating of the duty of prayer, he proceeds with his argument thus: "What we have said, may be proved from the Divine Scriptures." In his books against Celsus, we find this passage: "That our religion teaches us to seek after wisdom, shall be shewn, both out of the ancient Jewish Scriptures, which we also use, and out of those written since Jesus, which are believed in the Churches to be divine." These expressions afford abundant evidence of the peculiar and exclusive authority which the Scriptures possessed.

V. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage*, whose age lies close to that of Origen, earnestly exhorts Christian teachers, in all doubtful cases, "to go back to the *fountain*; and, if the truth has in any case been shaken, to recur to the Gospels and apostolic writings."—"The precepts of the Gospel," says he in another place, "are nothing less than authoritative divine lessons, the foundations of our hope, the supports of

* Lard. Cred. vol. iv. p. 840.

our faith, the guides of our way, the safe-guards of our course to heaven."

VI. Novatus*, a Roman, contemporary with Cyprian, appeals to the Scriptures, as the authority by which all errors were to be repelled, and disputes decided. "That Christ is not only man, but God also, is proved by the sacred authority of the Divine Writings."—"The Divine Scripture easily detects and confutes the frauds of heretics."—"It is not by the fault of the heavenly Scriptures, which never deceive." Stronger assertions than these could not be used.

VII. At the distance of twenty years from the writer last cited, Anatolius†, a learned Alexandrian, and bishop of Laodicea, speaking of the rule for keeping Easter, a question at that day agitated with much earnestness, says of those whom he opposed, "They can by no means prove their point by the authority of the Divine Scripture."

* Lard. Cred. vol. v. p. 102. † Ib. vol. v. p. 146.

VIII. The

VIII. The Arians, who sprung up about fifty years after this, argued strenuously against the use of the words consubstantial, and essence, and like phrases; "*because they were not in Scripture* *." And in the same strain, one of their advocates opens a conference with Augustine, after the following manner: "If you say what is reasonable, I must submit. If you allege any thing from the Divine Scriptures, which are common to both, I must hear. But unscriptural expressions (quæ extra Scripturam sunt) deserve no regard."

Athanasius, the great antagonist of Arianism, after having enumerated the books of the Old and New Testament, adds, "These are the fountains of salvation, that he who thirsts may be satisfied with the oracles contained in them. In these alone the doctrine of salvation is proclaimed. Let no man add to them, or take any thing from them †."

* Lard. Cred. vol. vii. p. 283, 284.

† Ib. vol. xii. p. 182.

IX. Cyril,

IX. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem*, who wrote about twenty years after the appearance of Arianism, uses these remarkable words: "Concerning the divine and holy mysteries of faith, not the least article ought to be delivered without the Divine Scriptures." We are assured that Cyril's Scriptures were the same as ours, for he has left us a catalogue of the books included under that name.

X. Epiphanius †, twenty years after Cyril, challenges the Arians, and the followers of Origen, "to produce any passage of the Old or New Testament, favouring their sentiments."

XI. Pœbadius, a Gallic bishop, who lived about thirty years after the council of Nice, testifies, that "the bishops of that council first consulted the Sacred Volumes, and then declared their faith ‡."

* Lard. Cred. vol. viii. p. 270. † Ib. p. 314.
‡ Ib. vol. ix. p. 52.

XII. Basil, bishop of Cæsarea, in Cappadocia, contemporary with Epiphanius, says, "that hearers instructed in the Scriptures ought to examine what is said by their teachers, and to embrace what is agreeable to the Scriptures, and to reject what is otherwise *."

XIII. Ephraim, the Syrian, a celebrated writer of the same times, bears this conclusive testimony to the proposition which forms the subject of our present chapter: "The truth written in the Sacred Volume of the Gospel, is a perfect rule. Nothing can be taken from it nor added to it, without great guilt †."

XIV. If we add Jerome to these, it is only for the evidence which he affords of the judgement of preceding ages. Jerome observes, concerning the quotations of *ancient* Christian writers, that is, of writers who were *ancient* in the year 400, that they made a distinction between books; some

* Lard. Cred. vol. ix. p. 124. † Ib. p. 202.

they

they quoted as of authority, and others not: which observation relates to the books of Scripture, compared with other writings, apocryphal or heathen *.

* Lardner, Cred. vol. x. pp. 123, 124.

SECTION III.

The Scriptures were in very early times collected into a distinct volume.

IGNATIUS, who was bishop of Antioch within forty years after the Ascension, and who had lived and conversed with the Apostles, speaks of the Gospel and of the Apostles, in terms which render it very probable, that he meant by the Gospel, the book or volume of the Gospels, and by the Apostles, the book or volume of their Epistles. His words in one place are *, "fleeing to the Gospel as the flesh of Jesus, and to the Apostles as the presbytery of the Church;" that is, as Le Clerc interprets them, "in order to understand the will of God, he fled to the Gospels, which he believed no less than if Christ in the flesh had been speaking to him; and to the wri-

* Lard. Cred. part ii. vol. i. p. 180.

tings

tings of the Apostles, whom he esteemed as the presbytery of the whole Christian Church." It must be observed, that about eighty years after this, we have direct proof, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria*, that these two names, "Gospel," and "Apostles," were the names by which the writings of the New Testament, and the division of these writings, were usually expressed.

Another passage from Ignatius is the following:—"But the Gospel has somewhat in it more excellent, the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, his passion and resurrection †."

And a third; "Ye ought to hearken to the Prophets, but especially to the Gospel, in which the passion has been manifested to us, and the resurrection perfected." In this last passage, the Prophets and the Gospel are put in conjunction; and as Ignatius undoubtedly meant by the Prophets a collection of writings, it is probable that

* Lardn. vol. ii, p. 516. † Ib. p. 182.

he meant the same by the Gospel, the two terms standing in evident parallelism with each other.

This interpretation of the word "Gospel," in the passages above quoted from Ignatius, is confirmed by a piece of nearly equal antiquity, the relation of the martyrdom of Polycarp by the Church of Smyrna. "All things," say they, "that went before, were done, that the Lord might shew us a martyrdom according to the Gospel, for he expected to be delivered up as the Lord also did *." And in another place, "We do not commend those who offer themselves, forasmuch as the Gospel teaches us no such thing†." In both these places, what is called the *Gospel*, seems to be the history of Jesus Christ, and of his doctrine.

If this be the true sense of the passages, they are not only evidences of our proposition, but strong and very ancient proofs of the high esteem in which the books of the New Testament were holden.

* Ignat. Ep. c. i. † Ib. c. iv.

II. Eu-

II. Eusebius relates, that Quadratus and some others, who were the immediate successors of the Apostles, travelling abroad to preach Christ, carried the Gospels with them, and delivered them to their converts. The words of Eusebius are: "Then travelling abroad, they performed the work of Evangelists, being ambitious to preach Christ, and *deliver the Scripture of the divine Gospels* *. Eusebius had before him the writings both of Quadratus himself, and of many others of that age, which are now lost. It is reasonable, therefore, to believe, that he had good grounds for his assertion. What is thus recorded of the Gospels, took place within sixty, or at the most seventy, years after they were published: and it is evident, that they must, before this time, (and, it is probable, long before this time,) have been in general use, and in high esteem in the Churches planted by the Apostles, inasmuch as they were now, we find, collected into a volume: and the immediate successors of the Apostles, they who preached the religion of Christ to those

* Lardner, Cred. part ii. vol. i. p. 236.

who had not already heard it, carried the volume with them, and delivered it to their converts.

III. Irenæus, in the year 178*, puts the Evangelic and Apostolic writings in connection with the Law and the Prophets, manifestly intending by the one a code or collection of Christian sacred writings, as the other expressed the code or collection of Jewish sacred writings. And,

IV, Melito at this time bishop of Sardis, writing to one Onesimus, tells his correspondent †, that he had procured an accurate account of the books of the Old Testament. The occurrence, in this passage, of the term *Old* Testament, has been brought to prove, and it certainly does prove, that there was then a volume or collection of writings called the *New* Testament.

V. In the time of Clement of Alexandria, about fifteen years after the last-quoted testimony, it is apparent that the Christian Scriptures were divided into two parts,

* Lard. Cred. vol. i. p. 383. † Ib. p. 331.

under

under the general titles of the Gospels and Apostles; and that both these were regarded as of the highest authority. One, out of many expressions of Clement, alluding to this distribution, is the following:—"There is a consent and harmony between the Law and the Prophets, the Apostles and the Gospel*."

VI. The same division, "Prophets, Gospels, and Apostles," appears in Tertullian †, the contemporary of Clement. The collection of the Gospels is likewise called by this writer the "Evangelic Instrument ‡;" the whole volume, the "New Testament;" and the two parts, the "Gospels and Apostles §."

VII. From many writers also of the third century, and especially from Cyprian, who lived in the middle of it, it is collected, that the Christian Scriptures were divided into two codes or volumes, one called the "Gospels or Scriptures of the Lord," the other, the "Apostles, or Epistles of the Apostles ||."

* Lard. Cred. vol. ii. p. 516. † Ib. 631.
‡ Ib. p. 574. § Ib. p. 632.
|| Ib. vol. iv. p. 846.

VIII. Eu-

VIII. Eusebius, as we have already seen, takes some pains to shew, that the Gospel of Saint John had been justly placed by the Ancients "the fourth in order, and after the other three *." These are the terms of his proposition: and the very introduction of such an argument proves incontestably, that the four Gospels had been collected into a volume, to the exclusion of every other; that their order in the volume had been adjusted with much consideration; and that this had been done by those who were called Ancients in the time of Eusebius.

In the Diocletian persecution in the year 303, the Scriptures were sought out and burnt †; many suffered death rather than deliver them up; and those who betrayed them to the persecutors, were accounted as lapsed and apostate. On the other hand, Constantine, after his conversion, gave directions for multiplying copies of the Divine Oracles, and for magnificently adorning them at the expence of the imperial treasury ‡. What the Christians of that age so

* Lard. Cred vol. viii. p. 90.

† Ib. vol. vii. p. 214, et seq. ‡ Ib. 432.

richly embellished in their prosperity, and, which is more, so tenaciously preserved under persecution, was the very volume of the New Testament which we now read.

SECTION IV.

Our present Sacred Writings were soon distinguished by appropriate names and titles of respect.

I. Polycarp. "I trust that ye are well exercised in the *Holy Scriptures*;—as in these Scriptures it is said, Be ye angry and sin not, and let not the sun go down upon your wrath *." This passage is extremely important; because it proves that, in the time of Polycarp, who had lived with the Apostles, there were Christian writings distinguished by the name of "Holy Scriptures," or *Sacred* Writings. Moreover the text quoted by Polycarp is a text found in the collection at this day. What also the same Polycarp hath elsewhere quoted in the same manner, may be considered as proved to belong to the collection; and this comprehends Saint Matthew's, and, probably,

* Lard. Cred. vol. i. p. 203.

Saint

Saint Luke's Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, ten epistles of Paul, the first epistle of Peter, and the first of John *. In another place, Polycarp has these words: "Whoever perverts the *oracles of the Lord* to his own lusts, and says there is neither resurrection nor judgement, he is the first-born of Satan †."—It does not appear what else Polycarp could mean by the "oracles of the Lord," but those same "Holy Scriptures," or Sacred Writings, of which he had spoken before.

II. Justin Martyr, whose apology was written about thirty years after Polycarp's epistle, expressly cites some of our present histories under the title of GOSPEL, and that not as a name by him first ascribed to them, but as the name by which they were generally known in his time. His words are these:—For the Apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, *which are called Gospels*, have thus delivered it, that Jesus commanded them to take bread, and give thanks †." There exists no doubt, but that,

* Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 223. † Ib. p. 222. ‡ Ib. p. 271.

by

by the memoirs above mentioned, Justin meant our present historical Scriptures; for throughout his works, he quotes these, and no others.

III. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, who came thirty years after Justin, in a passage preserved in Eusebius, (for his works are lost,) speaks "of the Scriptures of the Lord *."

IV. And at the same time, or very nearly so, by Irenæus, bishop of Lyons in France †, they are called "Divine Scriptures,"—"divine oracles,"—"Scriptures of the Lord,"—"Evangelic and Apostolic writings ‡." The quotations of Irenæus prove decidedly, that our present Gospels, and these alone, together with the Acts of the Apostles, were the historical books comprehended by him under these appellations.

V. Saint Matthew's Gospel is quoted by Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, contemporary

* Lardn. Cred. vol. i. p. 298.

† The reader will observe the remoteness of these two writers in country and situation.

‡ Lardn. Cred. vol. i. p. 343, et seq.

rary with Irenæus, under the title of the "evangelic voice *;" and the copious works of Clement of Alexandria, published within fifteen years of the same time, ascribe to the books of the New Testament the various titles of "Sacred Books,"—"Divine Scriptures,"—"divinely inspired Scriptures,"—"Scriptures of the Lord,"—"the true Evangelical Canon †."

VI. Tertullian, who joins on with Clement, beside adopting most of the names and epithets above noticed, calls the Gospels "our Digesta," in allusion, as it should seem, to some collection of Roman laws then extant ‡.

VII. By Origen, who came thirty years after Tertullian, the same, and other no less strong titles, are applied to the Christian Scriptures; and, in addition thereunto, this writer frequently speaks of the "Old and New Testament,"—"the ancient and new Scriptures,"—"the ancient and new oracles §."

* Lardn. vol. i. p. 427. † Ib. vol. ii. p. 515.
‡ Ib. p. 630. § Ib. vol. iii. p. 230.

VIII. In Cyprian, who was not twenty years later, they are "books of the Spirit," —"Divine fountains,"—"fountains of the Divine fulness *."

The expressions we have thus quoted, are evidences of high and peculiar respect. They all occur within two centuries from the publication of the books. Some of them commence with the companions of the Apostles; and they increase in number and variety, through a series of writers, touching upon one another, and deduced from the first age of the Religion.

* Lard. Cred vol. iv. p. 844.

SECTION V.

Our Scriptures were publicly read and expounded in the religious assemblies of the early Christians.

JUSTIN MARTYR, who wrote in the year 140, which was seventy or eighty years after some, and less, probably, after others of the Gospels were published, giving, in his first apology, an account, to the emperor, of the Christian worship, has this remarkable passage:

"The *memoirs of the Apostles*, or the writings of the Prophets, are *read* according as the time allows: and, when the reader has ended, the president makes a discourse, exhorting to the imitation of so excellent things *.'

* Lard. Cred. vol. i p. 273.

A few

A few short observations will shew the value of this testimony.

1. The "memoirs of the Apostles," Justin in another place expressly tells us, are what are called "Gospels:" and that they were the Gospels which we now use, is made certain by Justin's numerous quotations of *them*, and his silence about any others.

2. Justin describes the general usage of the Christian Church.

3. Justin does not speak of it as recent or newly instituted, but in the terms in which men speak of established customs.

II. Tertullian, who followed Justin at the distance of about fifty years, in his account of the religious assemblies of Christians as they were conducted in his time, says, "We come together to recollect the Divine Scriptures; we nourish our faith, raise our hope, confirm our trust, by the Sacred word *."

* Lardner, Cred. vol. ii. p. 628.

III. Euse-

III. Eusebius records of Origen, and cites for his authority the letters of bishops contemporary with Origen, that, when he went into Palestine about the year 216, which was only sixteen years after the date of Tertullian's testimony, he was desired by the bishops of that country to discourse and expound the Scriptures publicly in the Church, though he was not yet ordained a presbyter*. This anecdote recognizes the usage, not only of reading, but of expounding, the Scriptures; and both as subsisting in full force. Origen also himself bears witness to the same practice: "This (says he) we do, when the Scriptures are read in the church, and when the discourse for explication is delivered to the people†." And, what is a still more ample testimony, many homilies of his upon the Scriptures of the New Testament, delivered by him in the assemblies of the Church, are still extant.

IV. Cyprian, whose age was not twenty years lower than that of Origen, gives his people an account of having ordained two

* Lard. Cred. vol. iii. p. 68. † Ib. p. 302.

persons, who were before confessors, to be readers; and what they were to read, appears by the reason which he gives for his choice: "Nothing (says Cyprian) can be more fit, than that he, who has made a glorious confession of the Lord, should read publicly in the church; that he who has shewn himself willing to die a martyr, should read the *Gospel of Christ*, by which martyrs are made *."

V. Intimations of the same custom may be traced in a great number of writers in the beginning and throughout the whole of the fourth century. Of these testimonies I will only use one, as being, of itself, express and full. Augustine, who appeared near the conclusion of the century, displays the benefit of the Christian Religion on this very account, the public reading of the Scriptures in the churches, "where (says he) is a confluence of all sorts of people of both sexes; and where they hear how they ought to live well in this world, that they may deserve to live happily and eternally in

* Lard. Cred. vol. iv. p. 842.

another.

another. And this custom he declares to be universal: "The canonical books of Scripture being read every where, the miracles therein recorded are well known to all people.*"

It does not appear that any books, other than our present Scriptures, were thus publicly read, except that the epistle of Clement was read in the Church of Corinth, to which it had been addressed, and in some others; and that the Shepherd of Hermas was read in many Churches. Nor does it subtract much from the value of the argument, that these two writings partly come within it, because we allow them to be the genuine writings of apostolical men. There is not the least evidence, that any other gospel, than the four which we receive, was ever admitted to this distinction.

* Lard. Cred. vol. x. p. 276, et seq.

SECTION VI.

Commentaries were anciently written upon the Scriptures; harmonies formed out of them; different copies carefully collated; and versions made of them into different languages.

No greater proof can be given of the esteem in which these books were holden by the ancient Christians, or of the sense then entertained of their value and importance, than the industry bestowed upon them. And it ought to be observed, that the value and importance of these books consisted entirely in their genuineness and truth. There was nothing in them, as works of taste, or as compositions, which could have induced any one to have written a note upon them. Moreover it shews that they were even *then* considered as ancient books. Men do not write comments upon publications of their own times: therefore the testimonies

timonies cited under this head, afford an evidence which carries up the Evangelic writings much beyond the age of the testimonies themselves, and to that of their reputed authors.

I. Tatian, a follower of Justin Martyr, and who flourished about the year 170, composed a harmony, or collation, of the Gospels, which he called *Diatessaron*, Of the four*. The title, as well as the work, is remarkable; because it shews that then, as now, there were four, and only four, Gospels in general use with Christians. And this was little more than a hundred years after the publication of some of them.

II. Pantænus, of the Alexandrian school, a man of great reputation and learning, who came twenty years after Tatian, wrote many commentaries upon the Holy Scriptures, which, as Jerome testifies, were extant in his time†.

III. Clement of Alexandria wrote short

* Lard. Cred. vol. i. p. 307. † Ib. vol. i. p. 455.

explications of many books of the Old and New Testament *.

IV. Tertullian appeals from the authority of a later version, then in use, to the authentic Greek †.

V. An anonymous author, quoted by Eusebius, and who appears to have written about the year 212, appeals to the *ancient copies* of the Scriptures, in refutation of some corrupt readings alleged by the followers of Artemon ‡.

VI. The same Eusebius, mentioning by name several writers of the Church who lived at this time, and concerning whom he says, "There still remain divers monuments of the laudable industry of those ancient and ecclesiastical men," (*i. e.* of Christian writers who were considered as ancient in the year 300,) adds, "There are besides, treatises of many others, whose names we have not been able to learn, orthodox and ecclesiastical men, as the

* Lard. Cred. vol. ii. p. 462. † Ib. p. 638.
‡ Ib. vol. iii. p. 46.

inter-

interpretations of the divine Scriptures given by each of them shew *."

VII. The five last testimonies may be referred to the year 200; immediately after which, a period of thirty years gives us

Julius Africanus, who wrote an epistle upon the apparent difference in the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, which he endeavours to reconcile by the distinction of natural and legal descent, and conducts his hypothesis with great industry through the whole series of generations †.

Ammonius, a learned Alexandrian, who composed, as Tatian had done, a harmony *of the four Gospels;* which proves, as Tatian's work did, that there were four Gospels, and no more, at this time in use in the Church. It affords also an instance of the zeal of Christians for those writings, and of their solicitude about them ‡.

And, above both these, Origen, who

* Lard. Cred. vol. ii. p. 551. † Ib. vol. iii. p. 170.
‡ Ib. vol. iii. p. 122.

wrote commentaries, or homilies, upon most of the books included in the New Testament, and upon no other books but these. In particular, he wrote upon Saint John's Gospel, very largely upon Saint Matthew's, and commentaries, or homilies, upon the Acts of the Apostles *.

VIII. In addition to these, the third century likewise contains:

Dionysius of Alexandria, a very learned man, who compared, with great accuracy, the accounts in the four Gospels of the time of Christ's resurrection, adding a reflection which shewed his opinion of their authority: "Let us not think that the Evangelists disagree, or contradict each other, although there be some small difference; but let us honestly and faithfully endeavour to reconcile what we read †."

Victorin, bishop of Pettaw, in Germany, who wrote comments upon Saint Matthew's Gospel ‡.

* Lard. Cred. vol. iii. p. 352, 192. 202. 245.
† Ib. vol. iv. p. 166. ‡ Ib. p. 195.

Lucian,

Lucian, a presbyter of Antioch; and Hesychius, an Egyptian bishop, who put forth editions of the New Testament.

IX. The fourth century supplies a catalogue* of fourteen writers, who expended their labours upon the books of the New Testament, and whose works or names are come down to our times; amongst which number it may be sufficient, for the purpose of shewing the sentiments and studies of learned Christians of that age, to notice the following:

Eusebius, in the very beginning of the century, wrote expressly upon the discrepancies observable in the Gospels, and likewise a treatise, in which he pointed out what things are related by four, what by three, what by two, and what by one Evangelist.

* Eusebius, A. D. - -	315	Gregory, Nyssen, - -	371
Juvencus, Spain, -	330	Didimus of Alex. - -	370
Theodore, Thrace,	334	Ambrose of Milan, -	374
Hilary, Poictiers, -	354	Diodore of Tarsus, -	378
Fortunatus, - - - -	340	Gaudent. of Brescia, -	387
Apollinarius of Laodicea, - - - - -	362	Theodore of Cilicia, -	394
Damasus, Rome, -	366	Jerome, - - - - - -	392
		Chrysostom, - - - -	398

gelist*. This author also testifies, what is certainly a material piece of evidence, "that the writings of the Apostles had obtained such an esteem, as to be translated into every language both of Greeks and Barbarians, and to be diligently studied by all nations †." This testimony was given about the year 300; how long *before* that date these translations were made, does not appear.

Damasus, bishop of Rome, corresponded with Saint Jerome upon the exposition of difficult texts of Scripture; and, in a letter still remaining, desires Jerome to give him a clear explanation of the word Hosanna, found in the New Testament; "he (Damasus) having met with very different interpretations of it in the Greek and Latin commentaries of Catholic writers which he had read ‡." This last clause shews the number and variety of commentaries then extant.

Gregory of Nyssen, at one time, appeals

* Lard. Cred. vol. viii. p. 40. † Ib. p. 201.
‡ Ib. vol. ix. p. 108.

to the most exact copies of Saint Mark's Gospel; at another time, compares together, and proposes to reconcile, the several accounts of the Resurrection *given by the four Evangelists*; which limitation proves, that there were no other histories of Christ deemed authentic beside these, or included in the same character with these. This writer observes, acutely enough, that the disposition of the clothes in the sepulchre, the napkin that was about our Saviour's head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself, did not bespeak the terror and hurry of thieves, and therefore refutes the story of the body being stolen*.

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, remarked various readings in the Latin copies of the New Testament, and appeals to the original Greek;

And Jerome, towards the conclusion of this century, put forth an edition of the New Testament in Latin, corrected, at least

* Lard. Cred. vol. ix. p. 163.

as to the Gospels, by Greek copies, "and those (he says) ancient."

Lastly, Chrysostom, it is well known, delivered and published a great many homilies, or sermons, upon the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.

It is needless to bring down this article lower; but it is of importance to add, that there is no example of Christian writers of the three first centuries composing comments upon any other books than those which are found in the New Testament, except the single one of Clement of Alexandria, commenting upon a book called the Revelation of Peter.

Of the *ancient versions* of the New Testament, one of the most valuable is the Syriac. Syriac was the language of Palestine when Christianity was there first established. And although the books of Scripture were written in Greek, for the purpose of a more extended circulation than within the precincts of Judea, yet it is probable

that

that they would soon be translated into the vulgar language of the country where the religion first prevailed. Accordingly, a Syriac translation is now extant, all along, so far as it appears, used by the inhabitants of Syria, bearing many internal marks of high antiquity, supported in its pretensions by the uniform tradition of the East, and confirmed by the discovery of many very ancient manuscripts in the libraries of Europe. It is about 200 years since a bishop of Antioch sent a copy of this translation into Europe, to be printed; and this seems to be the first time that the translation became generally known to these parts of the world. The bishop of Antioch's Testament was found to contain all our books, except the second epistle of Peter, the second and third of John, and the Revelation; which books, however, have since been discovered in that language in some ancient manuscripts of Europe. But in this collection, no other book, beside what is in ours, appears ever to have had a place. And, which is very worthy of observation, the text, though preserved

preserved in a remote country, and without communication with ours, differs from ours very little, and in nothing that is important*.

* Jones on the Canon, vol. i. c. 14.

SECTION VII.

Our Scriptures were received by ancient Christians of different sects and persuasions, by many Heretics as well as Catholics, and were usually appealed to by both sides in the controversies which arose in those days.

THE three most ancient topics of controversy amongst Christians, were, the authority of the Jewish constitution, the origin of evil, and the nature of Christ. Upon the first of these, we find, in very early times, one class of heretics rejecting the Old Testament entirely; another contending for the obligation of its law, in all its parts, throughout its whole extent, and over every one, who sought acceptance with God. Upon the two latter subjects, a natural, perhaps, and venial, but a fruitless, eager, and impatient curiosity, prompted by the philosophy and by the scholastic habits of the

the age, which carried men much into bold hypotheses and conjectural solutions, raised, amongst some who professed Christianity, very wild and unfounded opinions. I think there is no reason to believe that the number of these bore any considerable proportion to the body of the Christian Church; and amidst the disputes which such opinions necessarily occasioned, it is a great satisfaction to perceive, what, in a vast plurality of instances, we do perceive, all sides recurring to the same Scriptures.

* I. Basilides lived near the age of the Apostles, about the year 120, or, perhaps, sooner†. He rejected the Jewish institution, not as spurious, but as proceeding from a being inferior to the true God; and in other respects advanced a scheme of theology widely different from the general doctrine of the Christian Church, and which, as it gained over some dis-

* The materials of the former part of this section are taken from Dr. Lardner's History of the Heretics of the two first Centuries, published since his death, with additions, by the Rev. Mr. Hogg, of Exeter, and inserted into the ninth volume of his works, of the edition of 1778.

† Vol. ix. p. 271.

ciples,

ciples, was warmly opposed by Christian writers of the second and third century. In these writings, there is positive evidence that Basilides received the Gospel of Matthew; and there is no sufficient proof that he rejected any of the other three: on the contrary, it appears that he wrote a commentary upon the Gospel, so copious as to be divided into twenty-four books*.

II. The Valentinians appeared about the same time†. Their heresy consisted in certain notions concerning angelic natures, which can hardly be rendered intelligible to a modern reader. They seem, however, to have acquired as much importance as any of the Separatists of that early age. Of this sect, Irenæus, who wrote A. D. 172, expressly records that they endeavoured to fetch arguments for their opinions from the evangelic and apostolic writings‡. Heracleon, one of the most celebrated of the sect, and who lived probably so early as the year 125, wrote commentaries upon

* Lard. vol. ix. ed. 1788, p. 305, 306.

† Ib. p. 350, 351. ‡ Vol. i. p. 383.

Luke and John*. Some observations also of his upon Matthew are preserved by Origen†. Nor is there any reason to doubt that he received the whole New Testament.

III. The Carpocratians were also an early heresy, little, if at all, later than the two preceding‡. Some of their opinions resembled what we at this day mean by Socinianism. With respect to the Scriptures, they are specifically charged, by Irenæus and by Epiphanius, with endeavouring to pervert a passage in Matthew, which amounts to a positive proof that they received that Gospel§. Negatively, they are not accused, by their adversaries, of rejecting any part of the New Testament.

IV. The Sethians, A. D. 150‖; the Montanists, A. D. 156¶; the Marcosians, 160**; Hermogenes, A. D. 180††; Praxias, A. D. 196‡‡; Artemon, A. D. 200§§;

* Lard. vol. ix. ed. 1788. p. 352. † Ib. 353.
‡ Ib. 309. § Ib. 318. ‖ Ib. 455.
¶ Ib. 482. ** Ib. 348. †† Ib. 473.
‡‡ Ib. 433. §§ Ib. 466.

Theodotus.

Theodotus A. D. 200; all included under the denomination of heretics, and all engaged in controversies with Catholic Christians, received the Scriptures of the New Testament.

V. Tatian, who lived in the year 172, went into many extravagant opinions, was the founder of a sect called Encratites, and was deeply involved in disputes with the Christians of that age; yet Tatian so received the four Gospels, as to compose a harmony from them.

VI. From a writer, quoted by Eusebius, of about the year 200, it is apparent that they, who, at that time, contended for the mere humanity of Christ, argued from the Scriptures; for they are accused by this writer, of making alterations in their copies, in order to favour their opinions*.

VII. Origen's sentiments excited great controversies,—the bishops of Rome and Alexandria, and many others, condemning,

* Lard. vol. iii. p. 46.

 the

the bishops of the East espousing them; yet there is not the smallest question, but that both the advocates and adversaries of these opinions acknowledged the same authority of Scripture. In his time, which the reader will remember was about one hundred and fifty years after the Scriptures were published, many dissentions subsisted amongst Christians, with which they were reproached by Celsus; yet Origen, who has recorded this accusation without contradicting it, nevertheless testifies, that the four Gospels were received *without dispute*, by the whole Church of God under heaven*.

VIII. Paul of Samosata, about thirty years after Origen, so distinguished himself in the controversy concerning the nature of Christ, as to be the subject of two councils, or synods, assembled at Antioch, upon his opinions. Yet he is not charged by his adversaries with rejecting any book of the New Testament. On the contrary, Epiphanius, who wrote a history of here-

* Lard. vol. iv. p. 642.

tics a hundred years afterwards, says, that Paul endeavoured to support his doctrine by texts of Scripture. And Vincentius Lirinensis, A. D. 434, speaking of Paul and other heretics of the same age, has these words: "Here, perhaps, some one may ask, whether heretics also urge the testimony of Scripture. They urge it indeed, explicitly and vehemently; for you may see them flying through every book of the sacred law*."

IX. A controversy at the same time existed with the Noëtians or Sabellians, who seem to have gone into the opposite extreme from that of Paul of Samosata and his followers. Yet, according to the express testimony of Epiphanius, Sabellius received all the Scriptures. And with both sects Catholic writers constantly allege the Scriptures, and reply to the arguments which their opponents drew from particular texts.

We have here, therefore, a proof that parties, who were the most opposite and

* Lard. vol. xi. p. 158.

irrecon-

irreconcileable to one another, acknowledged the authority of Scripture with equal deference.

X. And as a general testimony to the same point, may be produced what was said by one of the bishops of the council of Carthage, which was holden a little before this time:—"I am of opinion that blasphemous and wicked heretics, who *pervert* the sacred and adorable words of the Scriptures, should be execrated*." Undoubtedly what they perverted, they received.

XI. The Millennium, Novatianism, the baptism of heretics, the keeping of Easter, engaged also the attention and divided the opinions of Christians, at and before that time; (and, by the way, it may be observed, that such disputes, though on some accounts to be blamed, shewed how much men were in earnest upon the subject;) yet every one appealed for the grounds of his opinion to Scripture authority. Dionysius

* Lard. vol. xi. p. 839.

of Alexandria, who flourished A. D. 247, describing a conference or public disputation, with the Millennarians of Egypt, confesses of them, though their adversary, "that they embraced whatever could be made out by good arguments from the Holy Scriptures*." Novatus, A. D. 251, distinguished by some rigid sentiments concerning the reception of those who had lapsed, and the founder of a numerous sect, in his few remaining works quotes the Gospel with the same respect as other Christians did: and concerning his followers, the testimony of Socrates, who wrote about the year 440, is positive, *viz.* "That in the disputes between the Catholics and them, each side endeavoured to support itself by the authority of the Divine Scriptures †."

XII. The Donatists, who sprung up in the year 328, used the same Scriptures as we do. "Produce (saith Augustine) some proof from the Scriptures, whose authority is common to us both ‡."

* Lard. vol. iv. p. 666. † Ib. vol. v. p. 105.
‡ Ib. vol. vii. p. 243.

XIII. It

XIII. It is perfectly notorious, that, in the Arian controversy, which arose soon after the year 300, both sides appealed to the same Scriptures, and with equal professions of deference and regard. The Arians, in their council of Antioch, A. D. 341, pronounce, that, "if any one, contrary to the sound doctrine of the Scriptures, say that the Son is a creature, as one of the creatures, let him be an anathema*." They and the Athanasians mutually accuse each other of using *unscriptural* phrases; which was a mutual acknowledgement of the conclusive authority of Scripture.

XIV. The Priscillianists, A. D. 378†, the Pelagians, A. D. 405‡, received the same Scriptures as we do.

XV. The testimony of Chrysostom, who lived near the year 400, is so positive in affirmation of the proposition which we maintain, that it may form a proper conclusion of the argument. "The general

* Lard. vol. vii. p. 277. † Ib. vol. ix. p. 325.
‡ Ib. vol. xi. p. 52.

reception

reception of the Gospels is a proof that their history is true and consistent; for, since the writing of the Gospels, many heresies have arisen, holding opinions contrary to what is contained in them, who yet receive the Gospels either entire or in part*." I am not moved by what may seem a deduction from Chrysostom's testimony, the words "entire or in part;" for, if all the parts, which were ever questioned in our Gospels, were given up, it would not affect the miraculous origin of the religion in the smallest degree: *e. g.*

Cerinthus is said by Epiphanius to have received the Gospel of Matthew, but not entire. What the omissions were, does not appear. The common opinion, that he rejected the two first chapters, seems to have been a mistake†. It is agreed, however, by all who have given any account of Cerinthus, that he taught that the Holy Ghost (whether he meant by that name a person or a power) descended upon Jesus at his baptism; that Jesus from this time

* Lardner, vol. x. p. 316.
† Ib. vol. ix. ed. 1788, p. 322.

performed

performed many miracles, and that he appeared after his death. He must have retained therefore the essential parts of the history.

Of all the ancient heretics, the most extraordinary was Marcion*. One of his tenets was the rejection of the Old Testament, as proceeding from an inferior and imperfect deity; and in pursuance of this hypothesis, he erased from the New, and that, as it should seem, without entering into any critical reasons, every passage which recognized the Jewish Scriptures. He spared not a text which contradicted his opinion. It is reasonable to believe that Marcion treated books as he treated texts: yet this rash and wild controversialist published a recension, or chastised edition, of Saint Luke's Gospel, containing the leading facts, and all which is necessary to authenticate the religion. This example affords proof, that there were always some points, and those the main points, which neither wildness nor rashness, neither the fury of

* Lardner, sect. ii. c. x. Also Michael. vol. i. c. i. sect. xviii.

opposition nor the intemperance of controversy, would venture to call in question. There is no reason to believe that Marcion, though full of resentment against the Catholic Christians, ever charged them with forging their books. "The Gospel of Saint Matthew, the Epistle to the Hebrews, with those of Saint Peter and Saint James, as well as the Old Testament in general, (he said,) were writings not for Christians but for Jews*." This declaration shews the ground upon which Marcion proceeded in his mutilation of the Scriptures, *viz.* his dislike of the passages or the books. Marcion flourished about the year 130.

Dr. Lardner, in his General Review, sums up this head of evidence in the following words: "Noëtus, Paul of Samosata, Sabellius, Marcellus, Photinus, the Novatians, Donatists, Manicheans†, Priscillianists, beside Artemon, the Audians,

* I have transcribed this sentence from Michaelis (p. 38), who has not, however, referred to the authority upon which he attributes these words to Marcion.

† This must be with an exception, however, of Faustus, who lived so late as the year 384.

the

the Arians, and divers others, all received most or all the same books of the New Testament which the Catholics received; and agreed in a like respect for them as written by Apostles, or their disciples and companions*."

* Ib. vol. xii. p. 12.---Dr. Lardner's future enquiries supplied him with many other instances.

SECTION VIII.

The four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of Saint Paul, the first Epistle of John, and the first of Peter, were received without doubt by those who doubted concerning the other books which are included in our present Canon.

I STATE this proposition, because, if made out, it shews that the authenticity of their books was a subject amongst the early Christians of consideration and enquiry; and that, where there was cause of doubt, they did doubt; a circumstance which strengthens very much their testimony to such books as were received by them with full acquiescence.

I. Jerome, in his account of Caius, who was probably a presbyter of Rome, and who flourished near the year 200, records of him, that, reckoning up only thirteen

 epistles;

epistles of Paul, he says the fourteenth, which is inscribed to the Hebrews, is not his: and then Jerome adds, "With the Romans to this day it is not looked upon as Paul's." This agrees in the main with the account given by Eusebius of the same ancient author and his work; except that Eusebius delivers his own remark in more guarded terms: "And indeed to this very time, by *some* of the Romans, this epistle is not thought to be the Apostle's*."

II. Origen, about twenty years after Caius, quoting the epistle to the Hebrews, observes that some might dispute the authority of that epistle; and therefore proceeds to quote to the same point, as *undoubted* books of Scripture, the Gospel of Saint Matthew, the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's first Epistle to the Thessalonians†. And in another place, this author speaks of the Epistle to the Hebrews thus:—"The account come down to us is various; some saying that Clement, who was bishop of Rome, wrote this epistle; others, that it was Luke, the same who wrote the Gospel

* Lardner, vol. iii. p. 240. † Ib. p. 246.

and the Acts." Speaking also, in the same paragraph, of Peter, " Peter (says he) has left one epistle, acknowledged; let it be granted likewise that he wrote a second, for it is doubted of." And of John, " He has also left one epistle, of a very few lines; grant also a second and a third, for all do not allow them to be genuine." Now let it be noted, that Origen, who thus discriminates, and thus confesses his own doubts, and the doubts which subsisted in his time, expressly witnesses concerning the four Gospels, " that they alone are received without dispute by the whole Church of God under heaven*."

III. Dionysius of Alexandria, in the year 247, doubts concerning the Book of Revelation, whether it was written by Saint John; states the grounds of his doubt, represents the diversity of opinion concerning it, in his own time, and before his time†. Yet the same Dionysius uses and collates the four Gospels, in a manner which shews that he entertained not the smallest suspicion of *their* authority, and in a manner also which

* Lardner, vol. iii. p. 234. † Ib. vol. iv. p. 670.

shews

shews that they, and they alone, were received as authentic histories of Christ*.

IV. But this section may be said to have been framed on purpose to introduce to the reader two remarkable passages, extant in Eusebius's ecclesiastical history. The first passage opens with these words:—"Let us observe the writings of the apostle John which are *uncontradicted*; and first of all must be mentioned, as acknowledged of all, the Gospel according to him, well known to all the Churches under heaven." The author then proceeds to relate the occasions of writing the Gospels, and the reasons for placing Saint John's the last, manifestly speaking of all the four as parallel in their authority, and in the certainty of their original†. The second passage is taken from a chapter, the title of which is, "Of the Scriptures *universally acknowledged*, and of those that are not such." Eusebius begins his enumeration in the following manner:—"*In the first place*, are to be ranked the sacred four Gospels;

* Lardner vol. [illegible] p. 601. Ib. vol. viii. p. 90.

then

then the book of the Acts of the Apostles; after that are to be reckoned the Epistles of Paul. In the next place, that called the first Epistle of John, and the Epistle of Peter, are to be esteemed authentic. After this is to be placed, if it be thought fit, the Revelation of John, about which we shall observe the different opinions at proper seasons. Of the controverted, but yet well known, or approved by the most, are, that called the Epistle of James, and that of Jude, and the second of Peter, and the second and third of John, whether they are written by the Evangelist, or another of the same name*." He then proceeds to reckon up five others, not in our canon, which he calls in one place *spurious*, in another *controverted*, meaning, as appears to me, nearly the same thing by these two words†.

* Lardner, vol. viii. p. 99.

† That Eusebius could not intend, by the word rendered "spurious," what we at present mean by it, is evident from a clause in this very chapter, where, speaking of the Gospels of Peter and Thomas, and Matthias and some others, he says, "They are not so much as to be reckoned among the *spurious*, but are to be rejected as altogether absurd and impious." Vol. viii. p. 98.

It is manifest from this passage, that the four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, (the parts of Scripture with which our concern principally lies,) were acknowledged without dispute, even by those who raised objections, or entertained doubts, about some other parts of the same collection. But the passage proves something more than this. The author was extremely conversant in the writings of Christians, which had been published from the commencement of the institution to his own time: and it was from these writings that he drew his knowledge of the character and reception of the books in question. That Eusebius recurred to this medium of information, and that he had examined with attention this species of proof, is shewn, first, by a passage in the very chapter we are quoting, in which, speaking of the books which he calls spurious, "None (he says) of the ecclesiastical writers, in the succession of the Apostles, have vouchsafed to make any mention of them in their writings;" and, secondly, by another passage of the same work, wherein, speaking of the First Epistle of Peter, "This (he says) the presbyters of ancient

ancient times have quoted in their writings as undoubtedly genuine*;" and then, speaking of some other writings bearing the name of Peter, "We know (he says) that they have not been delivered down to us in the number of Catholic writings, forasmuch as no ecclesiastical writer of the ancients, or of our times, has made use of testimonies out of them." "But in the progress of this history," (the author proceeds,) "we shall make it our business to shew, together with the successions from the Apostles, what ecclesiastical writers, in every age, have used such writings as these which are contradicted, and what they have said with regard to the Scriptures received in the New Testament, *and acknowledged by all*, and with regard to those which are not such †."

After this it is reasonable to believe, that, when Eusebius states the four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, as uncontradicted, uncontested, and acknowledged by all; and when he places them in opposition, not only to those which were spurious, in our

* Lard. p. 99. † Ib. p. 111.

 sense

sense of that term, but to those which were controverted, and even to those which were well known and approved by many, yet doubted of by some; he represents not only the sense of his own age, but the result of the evidence which the writings of prior ages, from the Apostles' time to his own, had furnished to his enquiries. The opinion of Eusebius and his contemporaries appears to have been founded upon the testimony of writers whom they *then* called ancient: and we may observe, that such of the works of these writers as have come down to our times, entirely confirm the judgement, and support the distinction which Eusebius proposes. The books which he calls "books universally acknowledged," are in fact used and quoted in the remaining works of Christian writers, during the 250 years between the Apostles' time and that of Eusebius, much more frequently than, and in a different manner from, those the authority of which, he tells us, was disputed.

SECTION IX

Our historical Scriptures were attacked by the early adversaries of Christianity, as containing the accounts upon which the Religion was founded.

1. NEAR the middle of the second century, Celsus, a heathen philosopher, wrote a professed treatise against Christianity. To this treatise, Origen, who came about fifty years after him, published an answer, in which he frequently recites his adversary's words and arguments. The work of Celsus is lost; but that of Origen remains. Origen appears to have given us the words of Celsus, where he professes to give them, very faithfully, and, amongst other reasons for thinking so, this is one, that the objection, as stated by him from Celsus, is sometimes stronger than his own answer. I think it also probable, that Origen, in his answer, has retailed a large portion of the work

works of Celsus: "That it may not be suspected (he says) that we pass by any chapters, because we have no answers at hand, I have thought it best, according to my ability, to confute every thing proposed by him, not so much observing the natural order of things, as the order which he has taken himself*."

Celsus wrote about one hundred years after the Gospels were published; and therefore any notices of these books from him are extremely important for their antiquity. They are, however, rendered more so by the character of the author; for, the reception, credit, and notoriety of these books must have been well established amongst Christians, to have made them subjects of animadversion and opposition by strangers and by enemies. It evinces the truth of what Chrysostom, two centuries afterwards, observed, that "the Gospels, when written, were not hidden in a corner or buried in obscurity, but they were made known to all the world, before enemies as well as others, even as they are now†."

* Orig. cont. Cels. l. i. sect. 41. † In Matt. hom. i. 7.

1. Celsus.

1. Celsus, or the Jew whom he personates, uses these words:—"I could say many things concerning the affairs of Jesus, and those, too, different from those written by the disciples of Jesus; but I purposely omit them*." Upon this passage it has been rightly observed, that it is not easy to believe, that if Celsus could have contradicted the Disciples upon good evidence in any material point, he would have omitted to do so, and that the assertion is, what Origen calls it, a mere oratorical flourish.

It is sufficient however to prove, that, in the time of Celsus, there were books well known, and allowed to be written by the Disciples of Jesus, which books contained a history of him. By the term *disciple*, Celsus does not mean the followers of Jesus in general; for them he calls Christians, or believers, or the like; but those who had been taught by Jesus himself, *i. e.* his Apostles and companions.

2. In another passage, Celsus accuses the

* Lard. Jewish and Heathen Test, vol. ii, p. 274.

Christians of altering the Gospel*. The accusation refers to some variations in the readings of particular passages: for, Celsus goes on to object, that when they are pressed hard, and one reading has been confuted, they disown that, and fly to another. We cannot perceive from Origen, that Celsus specified any particular instances, and without such specification the charge is of no value. But the true conclusion to be drawn from it is, that there were in the hands of the Christians, histories, which were even then of some standing: for, various readings and corruptions do not take place in recent productions.

The former quotation, the reader will remember, proves that these books were composed by the Disciples of Jesus, strictly so called; the present quotation shews, that, though objections were taken by the adversaries of the Religion to the integrity of these books, none were made to their genuineness.

3. In a third passage, the Jew, whom Celsus introduces, shuts up an argument

* Lard. vol. ii. 275.

in this manner. "These things then we have alleged to you out of *your own writings*, not needing any other weapons*." It is manifest that this boast proceeds upon the supposition that the books, over which the writer affects to triumph, possessed an authority by which Christians confessed themselves to be bound.

4. That the books to which Celsus refers were no other than our present Gospels, is made out by his allusions to various passages still found in these Gospels. Celsus takes notice of the *genealogies*, which fixes two of these Gospels; of the precepts, Resist not him that injures you, and, If a man strike thee on the one cheek, offer to him the other also†; of the woes denounced by Christ; of his predictions; of his saying, that it is impossible to serve two masters‡; of the purple robe, the crown of thorns, and the reed in his hand; of the blood that flowed from the body of Jesus upon the cross§, which circumstance is recorded by John alone; and (what is *instar omnium*

* Lard. vol. ii. p. 276. † Ib. ‡ Ib. p. 277.
§ Ib. p. 280, 281.

for the purpose for which we produce it) of the difference in the accounts given of the Resurrection by the Evangelists, some mentioning two angels at the sepulchre, others only one*.

It is extremely material to remark, that Celsus not only perpetually referred to the accounts of Christ contained in the four Gospels†, but that he referred to no other accounts; that he founded none of his objections to Christianity upon any thing delivered in spurious gospels.

II. What Celsus was in the second century, Porphyry became in the third. His work, which was a large and formal treatise against the Christian Religion, is not extant. We must be content therefore to gather his objections from Christian writers, who have noticed in order to answer them; and enough remains of this species of information, to prove completely, that Porphyry's animadversions were directed

* Lard. vol. ii. p. 283.

† The particulars, of which the above are only a few, are well collected by Mr. Bryant, p. 140.

against the contents of our present Gospels, and of the Acts of the Apostles; Porphyry considering that to overthrow *them* was to overthrow the religion. Thus he objects to the repetition of a generation in Saint Matthew's genealogy; to Matthew's call; to the quotation of a text from Isaiah, which is found in a psalm ascribed to Asaph; to the calling of the lake of Tiberias a sea; to the expression in Saint Matthew, "the abomination of desolation;" to the variation in Matthew and Mark upon the text, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," Matthew citing it from Isaias, Mark from the Prophets; to John's application of the term "Word;" to Christ's change of intention about going up to the feast of tabernacles (John vii. 8); to the judgement denounced by Saint Peter upon Ananias and Sapphira, which he calls an imprecation of death*.

The instances here alleged, serve, in some measure, to shew the nature of Porphyry's objections, and prove that Porphyry had read the Gospels with that sort

* Jewish and Heathen Test. vol. iii. p. 166 et seq.

of

of attention which a writer would employ who regarded them as the depositaries of the religion which he attacked. Beside these specifications, there exists, in the writings of ancient Christians, general evidence, that the places of Scripture upon which Porphyry had remarked were very numerous.

In some of the above-cited examples, Porphyry, speaking of Saint Matthew, calls him *your evangelist*; he also uses the term Evangelists in the plural number. What was said of Celsus, is true likewise of Porphyry, that it does not appear that he considered any history of Christ, except these, as having authority with Christians.

III. A third great writer against the Christian religion was the Emperor Julian, whose work was composed about a century after that of Porphyry.

In various long extracts, transcribed from this work by Cyril and Jerome, it appears*,

* Jewish and Heathen Test. vol. iv. p. 77. et seq.

that

that Julian noticed *by name* Matthew and Luke, in the difference between their genealogies of Christ; that he objected to Matthew's application of the prophecy, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (ii. 15), and to that of "a virgin shall conceive," (i. 22); that he recited sayings of Christ, and various passages of his history, in the very words of the Evangelists; in particular, that Jesus healed lame and blind people, and exorcised demoniacs, in the villages of Bethsaida, and Bethany: that he alleged, that none of Christ's Disciples ascribed to him the creation of the world, except John: that neither Paul, nor Matthew, nor Luke, nor Mark, have dared to call Jesus, God; that John wrote later than the other Evangelists, and at a time when a great number of men in the cities of Greece and Italy were converted; that he alludes to the conversion of Cornelius and of Sergius Paulus, to Peter's vision, to the circular letter sent by the Apostles and elders at Jerusalem, which are all recorded in the Acts of the Apostles: by which quoting of the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and by quoting no other, Julian shews

shew that these were the historical books, and the only historical books, received by Christians as of authority, and as the authentic memoirs of Jesus Christ, of his Apostles, and of the doctrines taught by them. But Julian's testimony does something more than represent the judgement of the Christian Church in his time. It discovers also his own. He himself expressly states the early date of these records; he calls them by the names which they now bear. He all along supposes, he nowhere attempts to question their genuineness.

The argument in favour of the books of the New Testament, drawn from the notice taken of their contents by the early writers against the Religion, is very considerable. It proves that the accounts, which Christians had then, were the accounts which we have now; that our present Scriptures were theirs. It proves, moreover, that neither Celsus in the second, Porphyry in the third, nor Julian in the fourth century, suspected the authenticity of these books, or ever insinuated that Christians were mistaken in the authors to whom they

ascribed

ascribed them. Not one of them expressed an opinion upon this subject different from that which was holden by Christians. And when we consider how much it would have availed them to have cast a doubt upon this point, if they could; and how ready they shewed themselves to be, to take every advantage in their power; and that they were all men of learning and enquiry; their concession, or rather their suffrage, upon the subject, is extremely valuable.

In the case of Porphyry, it is made still stronger, by the consideration that he did in fact support himself by this species of objection when he saw any room for it, or when his acuteness could supply any pretence for alleging it. The prophecy of Daniel he attacked upon this very ground of spuriousness, insisting that it was written after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and maintains his charge of forgery by some, far-fetched indeed, but very subtle criticisms. Concerning the writings of the New Testament, no trace of this suspicion is any-where to be found in him*.

* Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament, vol. i p. 43; Marsh's Translation.

SECTION

SECTION X.

Formal catalogues of authentic Scriptures were published, in all which our present sacred histories were included.

THIS species of evidence comes later than the rest; as it was not natural that catalogues of any particular class of books should be put forth until Christian writings became numerous; or until some writings shewed themselves, claiming titles which did not belong to them, and thereby rendering it necessary to separate books of authority from others. But, when it does appear, it is extremely satisfactory; the catalogues, though numerous, and made in countries at a wide distance from one another, differing very little, differing in nothing which is material, and all containing the four Gospels. To this last article there is no exception.

I. In the writings of Origen which remain, and in some extracts preserved by Eusebius, from works of his which are now lost, there are enumerations of the books of Scripture, in which the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are distinctly and honourably specified, and in which no books appear beside what are now received *. The reader, by this time, will easily recollect that the date of Origen's works is A. D. 230.

II. Athanasius, about a century afterwards, delivered a catalogue of the books of the New Testament in form, containing our Scriptures and no others; of which he says, "In these alone the doctrine of Religion is taught; let no man add to them, or take any thing from them †."

III. About 20 years after Athanasius, Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, set forth a catalogue of the books of Scripture pub-

* Lardner, Cred. vol. iii. p. 234 et seq.; vol. viii. p. 196.
† Ib. vol. viii. p. 223.

licly read at that time in the Church of Jerusalem, exactly the same as ours, except that the "Revelation" is omitted *.

IV. And, fifteen years after Cyril, the council of Laodicea delivered an authoritative catalogue of canonical Scripture, like Cyril's, the same as ours, with the omission of the "Revelation."

V. Catalogues now become frequent. Within thirty years after the last date, that is, from the year 363 to near the conclusion of the fourth century, we have catalogues by Epiphanius†, by Gregory Nazianzen ‡, by Philaster bishop of Brescia in Italy §, by Amphilochius bishop of Iconium, all, as they are sometimes called, *clean* catalogues (that is, they admit no books into the number beside what we now receive), and all, for every purpose of historic evidence, the same as ours ||.

VI. Within

* Lard. Cred. vol. viii. p. 270. † Ib. p. 368.
‡ Ib. vol. ix. p. 132. § Ib. p. 373.
|| Epiphanius omits the Acts of the Apostles. This must have

VI. Within the same period, Jerome, the most learned Christian writer of his age, delivered a catalogue of the books of the New Testament, recognizing every book now received, with the intimation of a doubt concerning the Epistle to the Hebrews alone, and taking not the least notice of any book which is not now received *.

VII. Contemporary with Jerome, who lived in Palestine, was Saint Augustine, in Africa, who published likewise a catalogue, without joining to the Scriptures, as books of authority, any other ecclesiastical writing whatever, and without omitting one which we at this day acknowledge †.

VIII. And with these concurs another contemporary writer, Rufen, presbyter of Aquileia, whose catalogue, like theirs, is perfect and unmixed, and concludes with

have been an accidental mistake; either in him, or in some copyist of his work; for he elsewhere expressly refers to this book, and ascribes it to Luke.

* Lard. Cred. vol. x. p. 77. † Ib. p. 213.

these remarkable words : "These are the volumes which the fathers have included in the canon, and out of which they would have us prove the doctrine of our faith*."

* Lardner, Cred. vol. x. p. 187.

SECTION XI

These propositions cannot be predicated of any of those books which are commonly called Apocryphal Books of the New Testament.

I do not know that the objection taken from apocryphal writings is at present much relied upon by scholars. But there are many, who, hearing that various gospels existed in ancient times under the names of the Apostles, may have taken up a notion, that the selection of our present Gospels from the rest, was rather an arbitrary or accidental choice, than founded in any clear and certain cause of preference. To these it may be very useful to know the truth of the case. I observe therefore,

I. That, beside our Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, no Christian history, claiming to be written by an Apostle or apostolical

apostolical man, is quoted within three hundred years after the birth of Christ, by any writer now extant, or known; or, if quoted, is not quoted with marks of censure and rejection.

I have not advanced this assertion without enquiry; and I doubt not, but that the passages cited by Mr. Jones and Dr. Lardner, under the several titles which the apocryphal books bear; or a reference to the places where they are mentioned, as collected in a very accurate table, published in the year 1773, by the Rev. J. Atkinson, will make out the truth of the proposition to the satisfaction of every fair and competent judgement. If there be any book which may seem to form an exception to the observation, it is a Hebrew Gospel, which was circulated under the various titles of the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Nazarenes, of the Ebionites, sometimes called of the Twelve, by some ascribed to Saint Matthew. This Gospel is *once*, and only *once*, cited by Clemens Alexandrinus, who lived, the reader will remember, in the latter part of the second century, and which

same

same Clement quotes one or other of our four Gospels in almost every page of his work. It is also twice mentioned by Origen, A.D. 230; and both times with marks of diminution and discredit. And this is the ground upon which the exception stands. But what is still more material to observe is, that this Gospel, in the main, agreed with our present Gospel of Saint Matthew*.

Now if, with this account of the apocryphal Gospels, we compare what we have read concerning the canonical Scriptures in the preceding sections; or even recollect that general but well-founded assertion of Dr. Lardner, "That in the remaining works of Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, who all lived in the two first centuries, there are more and larger quotations of the small volume of the New Testament, than of all the works of Cicero, by writers of all characters, for several ages †;"

* In applying to this Gospel, what Jerome in the latter end of the fourth century has mentioned of a Hebrew Gospel, I think it probable that we sometimes confound it with a Hebrew copy of Saint Matthew's Gospel, whether an original or version, which was then extant.

† Lard. Cred. vol. xii. p. 53.

and

and if to this we add, that, notwithstanding the loss of many works of the primitive times of Christianity, we have, within the above-mentioned period, the remains of Christian writers, who lived in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, the part of Africa that used the Latin tongue, in Crete, Greece, Italy, and Gaul, in all which remains, references are found to our Evangelists; I apprehend, that we shall perceive a clear and broad line of division, between those writings, and all others pretending to similar authority.

II. But beside certain *histories* which assumed the names of Apostles, and which were forgeries properly so called, there were some other Christian writings, in the whole or in part of an historical nature, which, though not forgeries, are denominated apocryphal, as being of uncertain or of no authority.

Of this second class of writings, I have found only two which are noticed by any author of the three first centuries, without express terms of condemnation; and these are, the one, a book intitled the Preaching of

of Peter, quoted repeatedly by Clemens Alexandrinus, A. D. 196; the other, a book intitled the Revelation of Peter, upon which the above-mentioned Clemens Alexandrinus is said, by Eusebius, to have written notes; and which is twice cited in a work still extant, ascribed to the same author.

I conceive therefore, that the proposition we have before advanced, even after it hath been subjected to every exception, of every kind, that can be alleged, separates, by a wide interval, our historical Scriptures from all other writings which profess to give an account of the same subject.

We may be permitted however to add,

1. That there is no evidence that any spurious or apocryphal books whatever existed in the first century of the Christian æra, in which century all our historical books are proved to have been extant. "There are no quotations of any such books in the apostolical fathers, by whom I mean Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp, whose writings reach from about

about the year of our Lord 70, to the year 108;" (and some of whom have quoted each and every one of our historical Scriptures;) "I say this," adds Dr. Lardner, "because I think it has been proved *."

2. These apocryphal writings were not read in the Churches of Christians;

3. Were not admitted into their volume;

4. Do not appear in their catalogues;

5. Were not noticed by their adversaries;

6. Were not alleged by different parties, as of authority in their controversies;

7. Were not the subjects, amongst them, of commentaries, versions, collations, expositions.

Finally; beside the silence of three centuries, or evidence, within that time, of their

* Lard. Cred. vol. xii, p. 158.

rejection,

rejection, they were, with a consent nearly universal, reprobated by Christian writers of succeeding ages.

Although it be made out by these observations, that the books in question never obtained any degree of credit and notoriety which can place them in competition with our Scriptures; yet it appears, from the writings of the fourth century, that many such existed in that century, and in the century preceding it. It may be difficult at this distance of time to account for their origin. Perhaps the most probable explication is, that they were in general composed with a design of making a profit by the sale. Whatever treated of the subject, would find purchasers. It was an advantage taken of the pious curiosity of unlearned Christians. With a view to the same purpose, they were many of them adapted to the particular opinions of particular sects, which would naturally promote their circulation amongst the favourers of those opinions. After all, they were probably much more obscure than we imagine. Except the Gospel according to the He-

brews, there is none of which we hear more than the Gospel of the Egyptians; yet there is good reason to believe that Clement, a presbyter of Alexandria in Egypt, A. D. 184, and a man of almost universal reading, had never seen it*. A Gospel according to Peter, was another of the most ancient books of this kind; yet Serapion, bishop of Antioch, A. D. 200, had not read it, when he heard of such a book being in the hands of the Christians of Rhossus in Cilicia; and speaks of obtaining a sight of this Gospel from some sectaries who used it †. Even of the Gospel of the Hebrews, which confessedly stands at the head of the catalogue, Jerome, at the end of the fourth century, was glad to procure a copy by the favour of the Nazarenes of Berea. Nothing of this sort ever happened, or could have happened, concerning our Gospels.

One thing is observable of all the apocryphal Christian writings, *viz.* that they proceed upon the same fundamental history of

* Jones, vol. i. p. 243.

† Lard. Cred. vol. ii, p. 557.

Christ

Christ and his Apostles, as that which is disclosed in our Scriptures. The mission of Christ, his power of working miracles, his communication of that power to the Apostles, his passion, death, and resurrection, are assumed or asserted by every one of them. The names under which some of them came forth, are the names of men of eminence in our histories. What these books give, are not contradictions, but unauthorized additions. The principal facts are supposed, the principal agents the same; which shews, that these points were too much fixed to be altered or disputed.

If there be any book of this description, which appears to have imposed upon some considerable number of learned Christians, it is the Sibylline oracles; but, when we reflect upon the circumstances which facilitated that imposture, we shall cease to wonder either at the attempt or its success. It was at that time universally understood, that such a prophetic writing existed. Its contents were kept secret. This situation afforded to some one a hint, as well as an oppor-

opportunity, to give out a writing under this name, favourable to the already established persuasion of Christians, and which writing, by the aid and recommendation of these circumstances, would in some degree, it is probable, be received. Of the ancient forgery we know but little: what is now produced could not, in my opinion, have imposed upon any one. It is nothing else than the Gospel history, woven into verse; perhaps was at first, rather a fiction, than a forgery; an exercise of ingenuity, more than an attempt to deceive.

CHAP-

CHAPTER X.

Recapitulation.

THE reader will now be pleased to recollect, that the two points which form the subject of our present discussion, are, first, that the Founder of Christianity, his associates, and immediate followers, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings; secondly, that they did so, in attestation of the miraculous history recorded in our Scriptures, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of that history.

The argument, by which these two propositions have been maintained by us, stands thus:

No historical fact, I apprehend, is more certain, than that the original propagators of Christianity voluntarily subjected themselves

selves to lives of fatigue, danger, and suffering, in the prosecution of their undertaking. The nature of the undertaking; the character of the persons employed in it; the opposition of their tenets to the fixed opinions and expectations of the country, in which they first advanced them; their undissembled condemnation of the religion of all other countries; their total want of power, authority, or force; render it in the highest degree probable that this must have been the case. The probability is increased, by what we know of the fate of the Founder of the institution, who was put to death for his attempt; and by what we also know of the cruel treatment of the converts to the institution, within thirty years after its commencement: both which points are attested by heathen writers, and, being once admitted, leave it very incredible that the primitive emissaries of the Religion, who exercised their ministry, first, amongst the people who had destroyed their Master, and, afterwards, amongst those who persecuted their converts, should themselves escape with impunity, or pursue their purpose in ease and safety. This proba-

bility, thus sustained by foreign testimony, is advanced, I think, to historical certainty, by the evidence of our own books; by the accounts of a writer who was the companion of the persons whose sufferings he relates; by the letters of the persons themselves; by predictions of persecutions ascribed to the Founder of the religion, which predictions would not have been inserted in his history, much less have been studiously dwelt upon, if they had not accorded with the event, and which, even if falsely ascribed to him, could only have been so ascribed because the event suggested them; lastly, by incessant exhortations to fortitude and patience, and by an earnestness, repetition, and urgency upon the subject, which were unlikely to have appeared, if there had not been, at the time, some extraordinary call for the exercise of these virtues.

It is made out also, I think, with sufficient evidence, that both the teachers and converts of the Religion, in consequence of their new profession, took up a new course of life and behaviour.

 The

The next great question is, what they did this FOR. That it was *for* a miraculous story of some kind or other, is to my apprehension extremely manifest; because, as to the fundamental article, the designation of the person, *viz.* that this particular person, Jesus of Nazareth, ought to be received as the Messiah, or as a messenger from God, they neither had, nor could have, any thing but miracles to stand upon. That the exertions and sufferings of the Apostles were *for* the story which we have now, is proved by the consideration that this story is transmitted to us by two of their own number, and by two others personally connected with them; that the particularity of the narrative proves, that the writers claimed to possess circumstantial information, that from their situation they had full opportunity of acquiring such information, that they certainly, at least, knew what their colleagues, their companions, their masters taught; that each of these books contains enough to prove the truth of the Religion; that, if any one of them therefore be genuine, it is sufficient; that the genuineness however of all of them

is made out, as well by the general arguments which evince the genuineness of the most undisputed remains of antiquity, as also by peculiar and specific proofs, *viz.* by citations from them in writings belonging to a period immediately contiguous to that in which they were published; by the distinguished regard paid by early Christians to the authority of these books (which regard was manifested by their collecting of them into a volume, appropriating to that volume titles of peculiar respect, translating them into various languages, digesting them into harmonies, writing commentaries upon them, and, still more conspicuously, by the reading of them in their public assemblies in all parts of the world); by an universal agreement with respect to *these* books, whilst doubts were entertained concerning some others; by contending sects appealing to them; by the early adversaries of the religion not disputing their genuineness, but, on the contrary, treating them as the depositaries of the history, upon which the Religion was founded; by many formal catalogues of these, as of certain and authoritative writings, published in different and

 distant

distant parts of the Christian world; lastly, by the absence or defect of the above-cited topics of evidence, when applied to any other histories of the same subject.

These are strong arguments to prove, that the books actually proceeded from the authors whose names they bear (and have always borne, for there is not a particle of evidence to shew that they ever went under any other); but the strict genuineness of the books is perhaps more than is necessary to the support of our proposition. For even supposing that, by reason of the silence of antiquity, or the loss of records, we knew not who were the writers of the four Gospels, yet the fact, that they were received as authentic accounts of the transaction upon which the Religion rested, and were received as such by Christians, at or near the age of the Apostles, by those whom the Apostles had taught, and by societies which the Apostles had founded; this fact, I say, connected with the consideration, that they are corroborative of each other's testimony, and that they are farther corroborated by another contemporary history,

 taking

taking up the story where they had left it, and, in a narrative built upon that story, accounting for the rise and production of changes in the world, the effects of which subsist at this day; connected, moreover, with the confirmation which they receive, from letters written by the Apostles themselves, which both assume the same general story, and, as often as occasions lead them to do so, allude to particular parts of it; and connected also with the reflection, that if the Apostles delivered any different story, it is lost (the present and no other being referred to by a series of Christian writers, down from their age to our own; being likewise recognized in a variety of institutions, which prevailed, early and universally, amongst the disciples of the Religion); and that so great a change, as the oblivion of one story and the substitution of another, under such circumstances, could not have taken place: this evidence would be deemed, I apprehend, sufficient to prove concerning these books, that, whoever were the authors of them, they exhibit the story which the Apostles told, and for which, consequently, they acted, and they suffered.

If

If it be so, the Religion must be true These men could not be deceivers. By only not bearing testimony, they might have avoided all their sufferings, and have lived quietly. Would men in such circumstances pretend to have seen what they never saw; assert facts which they had no knowledge of; go about lying, to teach virtue; and, though not only convinced of Christ's being an impostor, but having seen the success of his imposture in his crucifixion, yet persist in carrying it on; and so persist, as to bring upon themselves, for nothing, and with a full knowledge of the consequence, enmity and hatred, danger and death?

OF THE

DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

OF

Christianity.

PROPOSITION II.

CHAPTER I.

Our first proposition was, "*That there is satisfactory evidence that many, pretending to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undertaken and undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.*"

Our

Our second proposition, and which now remains to be treated of, is, "*That there is* NOT *satisfactory evidence, that persons pretending to be original witnesses of any other similar miracles, have acted in the same manner, in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts.*

I ENTER upon this part of my argument, by declaring how far my belief in miraculous accounts goes. If the reformers in the time of Wickliffe, or of Luther; or those of England, in the time of Henry the Eighth, or of Queen Mary; or the founders of our religious sects since, such as were Mr. Whitfield and Mr. Wesley in our own times; had undergone the life of toil and exertion, of danger and sufferings, which we know that many of them did undergo, *for* a miraculous story; that is to say, if they had founded their public ministry upon the allegation of miracles wrought within their own knowledge, and upon narratives which could not be resolved into delusion or

or mistake; and if it had appeared, that their conduct really had its origin in these accounts, I should have believed them. Or, to borrow an instance which will be familiar to every one of my readers, if the late Mr. Howard had undertaken his labours and journeys in attestation, and in consequence of a clear and sensible miracle, I should have believed him also. Or, to represent the same thing under a third supposition; if Socrates had professed to perform public miracles at Athens; if the friends of Socrates, Phædo, Cebes, Crito, and Simmias, together with Plato, and many of his followers, relying upon the attestations which these miracles afforded to his pretensions, had, at the hazard of their lives, and the certain expense of their ease and tranquillity, gone about Greece, after his death, to publish and propagate his doctrines; and if these things had come to our knowledge, in the same way as that in which the life of Socrates is now transmitted to us, through the hands of his companions and disciples, that is, by writings received without doubt as theirs, from the age in which they were published to the present,

present, I should have believed this likewise. And my belief would, in each case, be much strengthened, if the subject of the mission were of importance to the conduct and happiness of human life; if it testified any thing which it behoved mankind to know from such authority; if the nature of what it delivered, required the sort of proof which it alleged; if the occasion was adequate to the interposition, the end worthy of the means. In the last case, my faith would be much confirmed, if the effects of the transaction *remained*; more especially, if a change had been wrought, at the time, in the opinion, and conduct of such numbers, as to lay the foundation of an institution, and of a system of doctrines, which had since overspread the greatest part of the civilized world. I should have believed, I say, the testimony, in these cases; yet none of them do more than come up to the apostolic history.

If any one choose to call assent to its evidence credulity, it is at least incumbent upon him to produce examples in which the

the same evidence hath turned out to be fallacious. And this contains the precise question which we are now to agitate.

In stating the comparison between our evidence, and what our adversaries may bring into competition with ours, we will divide the distinctions which we wish to propose into two kinds,—those which relate to the proof, and those which relate to the miracles. Under the former head we may lay out of the case,

I. Such accounts of supernatural events as are found only in histories by some ages posterior to the transaction, and of which it is evident that the historian could know little more than his reader. Ours is contemporary history. This difference alone removes out of our way, the miraculous history of Pythagoras, who lived five hundred years before the Christian æra, written by Porphyry and Jamblicus, who lived three hundred years after that æra; the prodigies of Livy's history; the fables of the heroic ages; the whole of the Greek and Roman, as well as of the Gothic mythology;

thology; a great part of the legendary history of Popish saints, the very best attested of which is extracted from the certificates that are exhibited during the process of their canonization, a ceremony which seldom takes place till a century after their deaths. It applies also with considerable force to the miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus, which are contained in a solitary history of his life, published by Philostratus, above a hundred years after his death; and in which, whether Philostratus had any prior account to guide him, depends upon his single unsupported assertion. Also to some of the miracles of the third century, especially to one extraordinary instance, the account of Gregory, bishop of Neocesarea, called Thaumaturgus, delivered in the writings of Gregory of Nyssen, who lived one-hundred-and-thirty years after the subject of his panegyric.

The value of this circumstance is shewn to have been accurately exemplified in the history of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the order of Jesuits*. His life, written by

* Douglas's Criterion of Miracles, p. 74.

a com-

a companion of his, and by one of the order, was published about fifteen years after his death. In which life, the author, so far from ascribing any miracles to Ignatius, industriously states the reasons why he was not invested with any such power. The life was re-published fifteen years afterwards, with the addition of many circumstances, which were the fruit, the author says, of further enquiry, and of diligent examination; but still with a total silence about miracles. When Ignatius had been dead nearly sixty years, the Jesuits, conceiving a wish to have the founder of their order placed in the Roman Calendar, began, as it should seem, for the first time, to attribute to him a catalogue of miracles, which could not then be distinctly disproved; and which there was, in those who governed the Church, a strong disposition to admit upon the slenderest proofs.

II. We may lay out of the case, accounts published in one country, of what passed in a distant country, without any proof that such accounts were known or received at home. In the case of Christianity,

tianity, Judea, which was the scene of the transaction, was the centre of the mission. The story was published in the place in which it was acted. The Church of Christ was first planted at Jerusalem itself. With that Church, others corresponded. From thence the primitive teachers of the institution went forth; thither they assembled. The Church of Jerusalem, and the several Churches of Judea, subsisted from the beginning, and for many ages*; received also the same books, and the same accounts, as other Churches did.

This distinction disposes, amongst others, of the above-mentioned miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus, most of which are related to have been performed in India, no evidence remaining that either the miracles ascribed to him, or the history of those miracles, were ever heard of in India. Those of Francis Xavier, the Indian missionary, with many others of the Romish

* The succession of many eminent bishops of Jerusalem, in the three first centuries, is distinctly preserved, as Alexander, A. D. 212, who succeeded Narcissus, then 116 years old.

breviary

breviary, are liable to the same objection, *viz.* that the accounts of them were published at a vast distance from the supposed scene of the wonders*

III. We lay out of the case *transient* rumours. Upon the first publication of an extraordinary account, or even of an article of ordinary intelligence, no one, who is not personally acquainted with the transaction, can know whether it be true or false, because any man may publish any story. It is in the future confirmation, or contradiction, of the account; in its permanency, or its disappearance; its dying away into silence, or its increasing in notoriety; its being followed up by subsequent accounts, and being repeated in different and independent accounts, that solid truth is distinguished from fugitive lies. This distinction is altogether on the side of Christianity. The story did not drop. On the contrary, it was succeeded by a train of action and events dependent upon it. The accounts, which we have in our hands, were composed after the first re-

* Doug. Crit. p. 84.

ports

ports must have subsided. They were followed by a train of writings upon the subject. The historical testimonies of the transaction were many and various, and connected with letters, discourses, controversies, apologies, successively produced by the same transaction.

IV. We may lay out of the case what I call *naked* history. It has been said, that if the prodigies of the Jewish history had been found only in fragments of Manetho, or Berosus, we should have paid no regard to them: and I am willing to admit this. If we knew nothing of the fact, but from the fragment; if we possessed no proof that these accounts had been credited and acted upon, from times, probably, as ancient as the accounts themselves; if we had no visible effects connected with the history, no subsequent or collateral testimony to confirm it; under these circumstances, I think that it would be undeserving of credit. But this certainly is not our case. In appreciating the evidence of Christianity, the books are to be combined with the institution; with the prevalency of the

Religion

religion at this day; with the time and place of its origin, which are acknowledged points; with the circumstances of its rise and progress, as collected from external history; with the fact of our present books being received by the votaries of the institution from the beginning; with that of other books coming after these, filled with accounts of effects and consequences resulting from the transaction, or referring to the transaction, or built upon it; lastly, with the consideration of the number and variety of the books themselves, the different writers from which they proceed, the different views with which they were written, so disagreeing as to repel the suspicion of confederacy, so agreeing as to shew that they were founded in a common original, *i. e.* in a story substantially the same. Whether this proof be satisfactory or not, it is properly a cumulation of evidence, by no means a naked or solitary record.

V. A mark of historical truth, although only a certain way, and to a certain degree, is *particularity*, in names, dates, places,

circumstances, and in the order of events, preceding or following the transaction: of which kind, for instance, is the particularity in the description of Saint Paul's voyage and shipwreck, in the 27th chapter of the Acts, which no man, I think, can read without being convinced that the writer was there; and also in the account of the cure and examination of the blind man, in the ninth chapter of Saint John's Gospel, which bears every mark of personal knowledge on the part of the historian*. I do not deny that fiction has often the particularity of truth; but then it is of studied and elaborate fiction, or of a formal attempt to deceive, that we observe this. Since, however, experience proves that particularity is not confined to truth, I have stated that it is a proof of truth only to a certain extent, *i. e.* it reduces the question to this, whether we can depend or not upon the *probity* of the relator? which is a considerable advance in our present argument; for an express attempt to deceive, in

* Both these chapters ought to be read for the sake of this very observation.

which

which case alone particularity can appear without truth, is charged upon the Evangelists by few. If the historian acknowledge himself to have received his intelligence from others, the particularity of the narrative shews, *primâ facie*, the accuracy of his enquiries, and the fulness of his information. This remark belongs to Saint Luke's history. Of the particularity which we allege, many examples may be found in all the Gospels. And it is very difficult to conceive, that such numerous particularities, as are almost every where to be met with in the Scriptures, should be raised out of nothing, or be spun out of the imagination without any fact to go upon*.

It

* "There is always some truth where there are considerable particularities related; and they always seem to bear some proportion to one another. Thus there is a great want of the particulars, of time, place, and persons, in Manetho's account of the Egyptian Dynasties, Etesias's of the Assyrian Kings, and those which the technical chronologers have given of the ancient kingdoms of Greece; and, agreeably thereto, these accounts have much fiction and falsehood, with some truth: whereas Thucydides's History of the Peloponnesian War, and Cæsar's of the War in Gaul, in both which the particulars

It is to be remarked, however, that this particularity is only to be looked for in direct history. It is not natural in references or allusions, which yet, in other respects, often afford, as far as they go, the most unsuspicious evidence.

VI. We lay out of the case such stories of supernatural events, as require, on the part of the hearer, nothing more than an *otiose* assent; stories upon which nothing depends, in which no interest is involved, nothing is to be done or changed in consequence of believing them. Such stories are credited, if the careless assent that is given to them deserve that name, more by the indolence of the hearer, than by his judgement: or, though not much credited, are passed from one to another without enquiry or resistance. To this case, and to this case alone, belongs what is called the love of the marvellous. I have never known it carry

ticulars of time, place, and persons are mentioned, are universally esteemed true to a great degree of exactness." Hartley, vol. ii. p. 109.

men further. Men do not suffer persecution from the love of the marvellous. Of the indifferent nature we are speaking of, are most vulgar errors and popular superstitions: most, for instance, of the current reports of apparitions. Nothing depends upon their being true or false. But not, surely, of this kind were the alleged miracles of Christ and his Apostles. They decided, if true, the most important question upon which the human mind can fix its anxiety. They claimed to regulate the opinions of mankind, upon subjects in which they are not only deeply concerned, but usually refractory and obstinate. Men could not be utterly careless in such a case as this. If a Jew took up the story, he found his darling partiality to his own nation and law wounded; if a Gentile, he found his idolatry and polytheism reprobated and condemned. Whoever entertained the account, whether Jew or Gentile, could not avoid the following reflection:—"If these things be true, I must give up the opinions and principles in which I have been brought up, the religion in which my fathers lived and died." It is not

concei-

conceivable that a man should do this upon any idle report or frivolous account, or, indeed, without being fully satisfied and convinced of the truth and credibility of the narrative to which he trusted. But it did not stop at opinions. They who believed Christianity, acted upon it. Many made it the express business of their lives to publish the intelligence. It was required of those who admitted that intelligence, to change forthwith their conduct and their principles, to take up a different course of life, to part with their habits and gratifications, and begin a new set of rules, and system of behaviour. The Apostles, at least, were interested not to sacrifice their ease, their fortunes, and their lives for an idle tale; multitudes beside them were induced, by the same tale, to encounter opposition, danger, and sufferings.

If it be said, that the mere promise of a future state would do all this; I answer, that the mere promise of a future state, without any evidence to give credit or assurance to it, would do nothing. A few wandering

fishermen

fishermen talking of a resurrection of the dead, could produce no effect. If it be further said, that men easily believe what they anxiously desire, I again answer that, in my opinion, the very contrary of this is nearer to the truth. Anxiety of desire, earnestness of expectation, the vastness of an event, rather causes men to disbelieve, to doubt, to dread a fallacy, to distrust, and to examine. When our Lord's resurrection was first reported to the Apostles, they did not believe, we are told, for joy. This was natural, and is agreeable to experience.

VII. We have laid out of the case those accounts which require no more than a simple assent; and we now also lay out of the case those which come merely *in affirmance* of opinions already formed. This last circumstance is of the utmost importance to notice well. It has long been observed, that Popish miracles happen in Popish countries; that they make no converts: which proves that stories are accepted, when they fall in with principles already fixed, with the public sentiments, or with the sentiments

of

of a party already engaged on the side the miracle supports, which would not be attempted to be produced in the face of enemies, in opposition to reigning tenets or favourite prejudices, or when, if they be believed, the belief must draw men away from their preconceived and habitual opinions, from their modes of life and rules of action. In the former case, men may not only receive a miraculous account, but may both act and suffer on the side, and in the cause, which the miracle supports, yet not act or suffer for the miracle, but in pursuance of a prior persuasion. The miracle, like any other argument which only confirms what was before believed, is admitted with little examination. In the moral, as in the natural world, it is *change* which requires a cause. Men are easily fortified in their old opinions, driven from them with great difficulty. Now how does this apply to the Christian history? The miracles, there recorded, were wrought in the midst of enemies, under a government, a priesthood, and a magistracy, decidedly and vehemently adverse to them, and to the pretensions which they supported. They were

were Protestant miracles in a Popish country; they were Popish miracles in the midst of Protestants. They produced a change; they established a society upon the spot, adhering to the belief of them; they made converts; and those who were converted, gave up to the testimony their most fixed opinions and most most favourite prejudices. They who acted and suffered in the cause, acted and suffered *for* the miracles; for there was no anterior persuasion to induce them, no prior reverence, prejudice, or partiality, to take hold of. Jesus had not one follower when he set up his claim. His miracles gave birth to his sect. No part of this description belongs to the ordinary evidence of heathen or Popish miracles. Even most of the miracles alleged to have been performed by Christians, in the second and third century of its æra, want this confirmation. It constitutes indeed a line of partition between the *origin* and the *progress* of Christianity. Frauds and fallacies might mix themselves with the progress, which could not possibly take place in the commencement of the religion; at least, according to any laws of

human conduct that we are acquainted with. What should suggest to the first propagators of Christianity, especially to fishermen, tax-gatherers, and husbandmen, such a thought as that of changing the religion of the world; what could bear them through the difficulties in which the attempt engaged them; what could procure any degree of success to the attempt; are questions which apply, with great force, to the setting out of the institution, with less, to every future stage of it.

To hear some men talk, one would suppose the setting up of a religion by miracles to be a thing of every day's experience; whereas the whole current of history is against it. Hath any founder of a new sect amongst Christians pretended to miraculous powers, and succeeded by his pretensions? "Were these powers claimed or exercised by the founders of the sects of the Waldenses and Albigenses? Did Wickliff in England pretend to it? Did Huss or Jerome in Bohemia? Did Luther in Germany, Zuinglius in Switzerland, Calvin in France, or any

of

of the reformers advance this plea*?" The French prophets, in the beginning of the present century, ventured to allege miraculous evidence, and immediately ruined their cause by their temerity. "Concerning the religion of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, of China, a single miracle cannot be named, that was ever offered as a test of any of those religions *before* their establishment†."

We may add to what has been observed, of the distinction which we are considering, that, where miracles are alleged merely in affirmance of a prior opinion, they who believe the doctrine may sometimes propagate a belief of the miracles which they do not themselves entertain. This is the case of what are called *pious* frauds; but it is a case, I apprehend, which takes place solely in support of a persuasion already established. At least it does not hold of the apostolical history. If the Apostles did not believe the miracles, they did not believe the religion; and, without this belief, where was the *piety*,

* Campbell on Miracles, p. 120, ed. 1766.

† Adams on Mir. p. 75.

what

what place was there for any thing which could bear the name or colour of piety, in publishing and attesting miracles in its behalf? If it be said that many promote the belief of revelation, and of any accounts which favour that belief, because they think them, whether well or ill founded, of public and political utility, I answer, that if a character exist, which can with less justice than another be ascribed to the founders of the Christian religion, it is that of politicians, or of men capable of entertaining political views. The truth is, that there is no assignable character which will account for the conduct of the Apostles, supposing their story to be false. If bad men, what could have induced them to take such pains to promote virtue? If good men, they would not have gone about the country with a string of lies in their mouths.

In appreciating the credit of any miraculous story, these are distinctions which relate to the evidence. There are other distinctions, of great moment in the question, which relate to the miracles themselves.

selves. Of which latter kind the following ought carefully to be retained.

I. It is not necessary to admit as a miracle, what can be resolved into a *false perception*. Of this nature was the demon of Socrates; the visions of Saint Anthony, and of many others; the vision which Lord Herbert of Cherbury describes himself to have seen; Colonel Gardiner's vision, as related in his life, written by Dr. Doddridge. All these may be accounted for by a momentary insanity; for, the characteristic symptom of human madness is the rising up in the mind of images not distinguishable by the patient from impressions upon the senses*. The cases, however, in which the possibility of this delusion exists, are divided from the cases in which it does not exist, by many, and those not obscure marks. They are, for the most part, cases of visions or voices. The object is hardly ever touched. The vision submits not to be handled. One sense does not confirm another. They are likewise almost always cases of a *solitary* witness. It

* Batty on Lunacy.

is in the highest degree improbable, and I know not, indeed, whether it hath ever been the fact, that the same derangement of the mental organs should seize different persons at the same time; a derangement, I mean, so much the same, as to represent to their imagination the same objects. Lastly, these are always cases of *momentary* miracles; by which term I mean to denote miracles, of which the whole existence is of short duration, in contradistinction to miracles which are attended with permanent effects. The appearance of a spectre, the hearing of a supernatural sound, is a momentary miracle. The sensible proof is gone, when the apparition or sound is over. But if a person born blind be restored to sight, a notorious cripple to the use of his limbs, or a dead man to life, here is a permanent effect produced by supernatural means. The change indeed was instantaneous, but the proof continues. The subject of the miracle remains. The man cured or restored is there: his former condition was known, and his present condition may be examined. This can by no possibility be resolved into false perception: and of this kind are by far the

 greater

greater part of the miracles recorded in the New Testament. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, he did not merely move, and speak, and die again; or come out of the grave, and vanish away. He returned to his home and family, and there continued; for we find him, some time afterwards in the same town, sitting at table with Jesus and his sisters; visited by great multitudes of the Jews, as a subject of curiosity; giving by his presence, so much uneasiness to the Jewish rulers as to beget in them a design of destroying him*. No delusion can account for this. The French prophets in England, some time since, gave out that one of their teachers would come to life again, but their enthusiasm never made them believe that they actually saw him alive. The blind man, whose restoration to sight at Jerusalem is recorded in the ninth chapter of Saint John's Gospel, did not quit the place, or conceal himself from enquiry. On the contrary, he was forthcoming, to answer the call, to satisfy the scrutiny, and to sustain the brow-beating of Christ's

* John xii. 1, 2. 9, 10.

angry

angry and powerful enemies. When the cripple at the gate of the temple was suddenly cured by Peter*, he did not immediately relapse into his former lameness, or disappear out of the city; but boldly and honestly produced himself along with the Apostles, when they were brought the next day before the Jewish council†. Here, though the miracle was sudden, the proof was permanent. The lameness had been notorious, the cure continued. This, therefore, could not be the effect of any momentary delirium, either in the subject or in the witnesses of the transaction. It is the same with the greatest number of the Scripture miracles. There are other cases of a *mixed* nature, in which, although the principal miracle be momentary, some circumstance combined with it is permanent. Of this kind is the history of Saint Paul's conversion‡. The sudden light and sound, the vision and the voice, upon the road to Damascus, were momentary: but Paul's blindness for three days in consequence of what had happened; the com-

* Acts iii. 2. † Acts iv. 14. ‡ Ib. ix.

munication made to Ananias in another place, and by a vision independent of the former; Ananias finding out Paul in consequence of intelligence so received, and finding him in the condition described, and Paul's recovery of his sight upon Ananias laying his hands upon him; are circumstances, which take the transaction, and the principal miracle as included in it, entirely out of the case of momentary miracles, or of such as may be accounted for by false perceptions. Exactly the same thing may be observed of Peter's vision preparatory to the call of Cornelius, and of its connection with what was imparted in a distant place to Cornelius himself, and with the message dispatched by Cornelius to Peter. The vision might be a dream; the message could not. Either communication, taken separately, might be a delusion; the concurrence of the two was impossible to happen without a supernatural cause.

Beside the risk of delusion which attaches upon momentary miracles, there is also much more room for *imposture*. The account cannot be examined at the moment: and,

and, when that is also a moment of hurry and confusion, it may not be difficult for men of influence to gain credit to any story which they may wish to have believed. This is precisely the case of one of the best attested of the miracles of Old Rome, the appearance of Castor and Pollux in the battle fought by Posthumius with the Latins at the lake Regillus. There is no doubt but that Posthumius, after the battle, spread the report of such an appearance. No person could deny it, whilst it was said to last. No person, perhaps, had any inclination to dispute it afterwards; or, if they had, could say with positiveness, what was, or what was not seen, by some or other of the army, in the dismay and amidst the tumult of a battle.

In assigning false perceptions as the origin to which some miraculous accounts may be referred, I have not mentioned claims to inspiration, illuminations, secret notices or directions, internal sensations, or consciousnesses of being acted upon by spiritual influences, good or bad; because these, appealing to no external proof, however

convincing

convincing they may be to the persons themselves, form no part of what can be accounted miraculous evidence. Their own credibility stands upon their alliance with other miracles. The discussion, therefore, of all such pretensions may be omitted.

II. It is not necessary to bring into the comparison what may be called *tentative* miracles; that is, where, out of a great number of trials, some succeed; and in the accounts of which, although the narrative of the successful cases be alone preserved, and that of the unsuccessful cases sunk, yet enough is stated to shew that the cases produced are only a few out of many in which the same means have been employed. This observation bears, with considerable force, upon the ancient oracles and auguries, in which a single coincidence of the event with the prediction is talked of and magnified, whilst failures are forgotten, or suppressed, or accounted for. It is also applicable to the cures wrought by relics, and at the tombs of Saints. The boasted efficacy of the king's touch, upon which Mr. Hume lays some stress, falls under the same description.

description. Nothing is alleged concerning it, which is not alleged of various nostrums, namely, out of many thousands who have used them, certified proofs of a few who have recovered after them. No solution of this sort is applicable to the miracles of the Gospel. There is nothing in the narrative, which can induce, or even allow, us to believe, that Christ attempted cures in many instances, and succeeded in a few; or that he ever made the attempt in vain. He did not profess to heal everywhere all that were sick; on the contrary, he told the Jews, evidently meaning to represent his own case, that, "although many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land, yet unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow:" and that "many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian *. By which examples,

* Luke iv. 25.

he

he gave them to understand, that it was not the nature of a Divine interposition, or necessary to its purpose, to be general; still less to answer every challenge that might be made, which would teach men to put their faith upon these experiments. Christ never pronounced the word, but the effect followed *. It was not a thousand sick that received his benediction, and a few that were benefited; a single paralytic is let down in his bed at Jesus's feet, in the midst of a surrounding multitude; Jesus bid him walk, and he did so†. A man with a withered hand is in the synagogue; Jesus bid him stretch forth his hand, in the presence of the assembly, and it was "restored whole

* One, and only one, instance may be produced in which the *disciples* of Christ do seem to have attempted a cure, and not to have been able to perform it. The story is very ingenuously related by three of the Evangelists ‡. The patient was afterwards healed by Christ himself; and the whole transaction seems to have been intended, as it was well suited, to display the superiority of Christ above all who performed miracles in his name; a distinction, which, during his presence in the world, it might be necessary to inculcate by some such proof as this.

† Mark ii. 3.

‡ Mark ix. 14. Matt. xvi. 20.

like

like the other *." There was nothing tentative in these cures; nothing that can be explained by the power of accident.

We may observe also, that many of the cures which Christ wrought, such as that of a person blind from his birth, also many miracles beside cures, as raising the dead, walking upon the sea, feeding a great multitude with a few loaves and fishes, are of a nature which does not in any wise admit of the supposition of a fortunate experiment.

III. We may dismiss from the question all accounts in which, allowing the phenomenon to be real, the fact to be true, it still remains *doubtful* whether a miracle were wrought. This is the case with the ancient history of what is called the thundering legion, of the extraordinary circumstances which obstructed the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem by Julian, the circling of the flames and fragrant smell at the martyrdom of Polycarp, the sudden

* Matt. xii. 10.

shower

shower that extinguished the fire into which the Scriptures were thrown in the Dioclesian persecution; Constantine's dream, his inscribing in consequence of it the cross upon his standard and the shields of his soldiers; his victory, and the escape of the standard-bearer; perhaps also the imagined appearance of the cross in the heavens, though this last circumstance is very deficient in historical evidence. It is also the case with the modern annual exhibition of the liquefaction of the blood of Saint Januarius at Naples. It is a doubt likewise, which ought to be excluded by very special circumstances, from these narratives which relate to the supernatural cure of hypochondriacal and nervous complaints, and of all diseases which are much affected by the imagination. The miracles of the second and third century are, usually, healing the sick, and casting out evil spirits, miracles in which there is room for some error and deception. We hear nothing of causing the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the lepers to be cleansed *.

* Jortin's Remarks, vol. ii. p. 51.

There are also instances in Christian writers, of reputed miracles, which were natural operations, though not known to be such at the time, as that of articulate speech after the loss of a great part of the tongue.

IV. To the same head of objection nearly, may also be referred accounts, in which the variation of a small circumstance may have transformed some extraordinary appearance, or some critical coincidence of events, into a miracle; stories, in a word, which may be resolved into exaggeration. The miracles of the Gospel can by no possibility be explained away in this manner. Total fiction will account for any thing; but no stretch of exaggeration that has any parallel in other histories, no force of fancy upon real circumstances, could produce the narratives which we now have. The feeding of the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes surpasses all bounds of exaggeration. The raising of Lazarus, of the widow's son at Nain, as well as many of the cures which Christ wrought, come not within the compass of misrepresentation. I mean,

I mean, that it is impossible to assign any position of circumstances however peculiar, any accidental effects however extraordinary, any natural singularity, which could supply an origin or foundation to these accounts.

Having thus enumerated several exceptions, which may justly be taken to relations of miracles, it is necessary, when we read the Scriptures, to bear in our minds this general remark, that, although there be miracles recorded in the New Testament, which fall within some or other of the exceptions here assigned, yet that they are united with others, to which none of the same exceptions extend, and that their credibility stands upon this union. Thus the visions and revelations, which Saint Paul asserts to have been imparted to him, may not, in their separate evidence, be distinguishable from the visions and revelations which many others have alleged. But here is the difference. Saint Paul's pretensions were attested by external miracles wrought by himself, and by miracles wrought in the cause to which these visions relate; or, to

 speak

speak more properly, the same historical authority, which informs us of one, informs us of the other. This is not ordinarily true of the visions of enthusiasts, or even of the accounts in which they are contained. Again, some of Christ's own miracles were *momentary*; as the transfiguration, the appearance and voice from Heaven at his baptism, a voice from the clouds on one occasion afterwards, (John xii. 30.) and some others. It is not denied, that the distinction which we have proposed concerning miracles of this species, applies, in diminution of the force of the evidence, as much to these instances as to others. But this is the case, not with all the miracles ascribed to Christ, nor with the greatest part, nor with many. Whatever force therefore there may be in the objection, we have numerous miracles which are free from it; and even these to which it is applicable, are little affected by it in their credit, because there are few, who, admitting the rest, will reject *them*. If there be miracles of the New Testament, which come within any of the *other* heads into which we have distributed the objections, the

the same remark must be repeated. And this is one way, in which the unexampled number and variety of the miracles ascribed to Christ, strengthens the credibility of Christianity. For it precludes any solution or conjecture about a solution, which imagination, or even which experience might suggest concerning some particular miracles, if considered independently of others. The miracles of Christ were of various kinds*, and performed in great varieties of situation, form, and manner; at Jerusalem, the metropolis of the Jewish nation and religion; in different parts of Judea and Galilee; in cities and villages; in synagogues, in private houses; in the street, in highways; with preparation, as in the case of Lazarus; by acci-

* Not only healing every species of disease, but turning water into wine (John ii.); feeding multitudes with a few loaves and fishes, (Matt. xiv. 14; Mark vi. 35; Luke ix. 12; John vi. 5.); walking on the sea, (Matt. xiv. 23.); calming a storm, (Matt. viii. 26; Luke viii. 23.); a celestial voice at his baptism, and miraculous appearance, (Matt. iii. 17; afterwards John xii. 28.); his transfiguration, (Matt. xvii. 1—8; Mark ix. 2; Luke ix. 28; 2 Peter i. 16, 17.); raising the dead in three distinct instances, (Matt. ix. 18; Mark v. 22. Luke viii. 41; Luke vii. 14; John xi).

dent,

dent, as in the case of the widow's son of Nain; when attended by multitudes, and when alone with the patient; in the midst of his disciples, and in the presence of his enemies; with the common people around him, and before Scribes and Pharisees, and rulers of the synagogues.

I apprehend that, when we remove from the comparison, the cases which are fairly disposed of by the observations that have been stated, many cases will not remain. To those which do remain, we apply this final distinction; "that there is not satisfactory evidence, that persons, pretending to be original witnesses of the miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undertaken and undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and properly in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts."

CHAPTER II.

BUT they, with whom we argue, have undoubtedly a right to select their own examples. The instances with which Mr. Hume has chosen to confront the miracles of the New Testament, and which, therefore, we are entitled to regard as the strongest which the history of the world could supply to the enquiries of a very acute and learned adversary, are the three following:

I. The cure of a blind and of a lame man at Alexandria, by the Emperor Vespasian, as related by Tacitus;

II. The restoration of the limb of an attendant in a Spanish Church, as told by Cardinal de Retz; and,

III. The cures said to be performed at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, in the early part of the present century.

1. The

1. The narrative of Tacitus is delivered in these terms: "One of the common people of Alexandria, known to be diseased in his eyes, by the admonition of the god Serapis, whom that superstitious nation worship above all other gods, prostrated himself before the emperor, earnestly imploring from him a remedy for his blindness, and entreating that he would deign to anoint with his spittle his cheeks and the balls of his eyes. Another, diseased in his hand, requested, by the admonition of the same god, that he might be touched by the foot of the emperor. Vespasian at first derided and despised their application; afterwards, when they continued to urge their petitions, he sometimes appeared to dread the imputation of vanity; at other times, by the earnest supplication of the patients, and the persuasion of his flatterers, to be induced to hope for success. At length he commanded an enquiry to be made by the physicians, whether such a blindness and debility were vincible by human aid. The report of the physicians contained various points; that in the one the power of vision

was not destroyed, but would return if the obstacles were removed; that in the other, the diseased joints might be restored, if a healing power were applied; that it was, perhaps, agreeable to the gods to do this; that the emperor was elected by divine assistance; lastly, that the credit of the success would be the emperor's, the ridicule of the disappointment would fall upon the patients.—Vespasian, believing that every thing was in the power of his fortune, and that nothing was any longer incredible, whilst the multitude, which stood by, eagerly expected the event, with a countenance expressive of joy, executed what he was desired to do. Immediately the hand was restored to its use, and light returned to the blind man. They who were present, relate both these cures, even at this time, when there is nothing to be gained by lying *"

Now, though Tacitus wrote this account twenty-seven years after the miracle is said to have been performed, and wrote at Rome of what passed at Alexandria, and wrote

* Tacit. Hist. lib. iv.

also

also from report: and although it does not appear that he had examined the story, or that he believed it (but rather the contrary), yet I think his testimony sufficient to prove that such a transaction took place; by which I mean, that the two men in question did apply to Vespasian; that Vespasian did touch the diseased in the manner related; and that a cure was reported to have followed the operation. But the affair labours under a strong and just suspicion, that the whole of it was a concerted imposture brought about by collusion between the patients, the physician, and the emperor. This solution is probable, because there was every thing to suggest, and every thing to facilitate such a scheme. The miracle was calculated to confer honour upon the emperor, and upon the god Serapis. It was achieved in the midst of the emperor's flatterers and followers; in a city, and amongst a populace, beforehand devoted to his interest, and to the worship of the god; where it would have been treason and blasphemy together, to have contradicted the fame of the cure, or even to have questioned it. And what is very observable

observable in the account is, that the report of the physicians is just such a report as would have been made of a case, in which no external marks of the disease existed, and which, consequently, was capable of being easily counterfeited, *viz.* that in the first of the patients the organs of vision were not destroyed, that the weakness of the second was in his joints. The strongest circumstance in Tacitus's narration is, that the first patient was "*notus* tabe oculorum," remarked or notorious for the disease in his eyes. But this was a circumstance which might have found its way into the story in its progress from a distant country, and during an interval of thirty years; or it might be true that the malady of the eyes was notorious, yet that the nature and degree of the disease had never been ascertained; a case by no means uncommon. The emperor's reserve was easily affected; or it is possible he might not be in the secret. There does not seem to be much weight in the observation of Tacitus, that they who were present, continued even then to relate the story when there was nothing to be gained by the lie. It only proves,

proves, that those who had told the story for many years, persisted in it. The state of mind of the witnesses and spectators *at the time*, is the point to be attended to. Still less is there of pertinency in Mr. Hume's eulogium on the cautious and penetrating genius of the historian; for, it does not appear that the historian believed it. The terms in which he speaks of Serapis, the deity to whose interposition the miracle was attributed, scarcely suffer us to suppose that Tacitus thought the miracle to be real, "by the admonition of the god Serapis, whom that superstitious nation (dedita superstitionibus gens) worship above all other gods." To have brought this supposed miracle within the limits of comparison with the miracles of Christ, it ought to have appeared, that a person of a low and private station, in the midst of enemies, with the whole power of the country opposing him, with every one around him prejudiced or interested against his claims and character, pretended to perform these cures; and required the spectators, upon the strength of what they saw, to give up their firmest hopes and opinions, and follow *him* through a life

a life of trial and danger; that many were so moved, as to obey his call, at the expense, both of every notion in which they had been brought up, and of their ease, safety, and reputation; and that by these beginnings, a change was produced in the world, the effects of which remain to this day; a case, both in its circumstances and consequences, very unlike any thing we find in Tacitus's relation.

2. The story taken from the Memoirs of Cardinal de Retz, which is the second example alleged by Mr. Hume, is this: "In the church of Saragossa in Spain, the canons shewed me a man whose business it was to light the lamps; telling me, that he had been several years at the gate with one leg only. I saw him with two *."

It is stated by Mr. Hume, that the Cardinal, who relates this story, did not believe it: and it nowhere appears, that he either examined the limb, or asked the patient, or indeed any one, a single question about the matter. An artificial leg, wrought with art,

* Liv. iv. A. D. 1654.

 would

would be sufficient, in a place where no such contrivance had ever before been heard of, to give origin and currency to the report. The ecclesiastics of the place would, it is probable, favour the story, inasmuch as it adavnced the honour of their image and church. And if *they* patronized it, no other person at Saragossa, in the middle of the last century, would care to dispute it. The story likewise coincided, not less with the wishes and preconceptions of the people, than with the interests of their ecclesiastical rulers: so that there was prejudice backed by authority, and both operating upon extreme ignorance, to account for the success of the imposture. If, as I have suggested, the contrivance of an artificial limb was then new, it would not occur to the Cardinal himself to suspect it; especially under the carelessness of mind with which he heard the tale, and the little inclination he felt to scrutinize or expose its fallacy.

3. The miracles related to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, admit in general of this solution. The

2 patients

patients who frequented the tomb, were so affected by their devotion, their expectation, the place, the solemnity, and, above all, by the sympathy of the surrounding multitude, that many of them were thrown into violent convulsions, which convulsions, in certain instances, produced a removal of disorders depending upon obstruction. We shall, at this day, have the less difficulty in admitting the above account, because it is the very same thing as hath lately been experienced in the operations of animal magnetism; and the report of the French physicians upon that mysterious remedy is very applicable to the present consideration, *viz.* that the pretenders to the art, by working upon the imaginations of their patients, were frequently able to produce convulsions; that convulsions so produced, are amongst the most powerful, but, at the same time, most uncertain and unmanageable applications to the human frame, which can be employed.

Circumstances, which indicate this explication in the case of the Parisian miracles, are the following:

1. They

1. They were *tentative*. Out of many thousand sick, infirm, and diseased persons, who resorted to the tomb, the professed history of the miracles contains only nine cures.

2. The convulsions at the tomb are admitted.

3. The diseases were, for the most part, of that sort which depends upon inaction and obstruction, as dropsies, palsies, and some tumours.

4. The cures were gradual; some patients attending many days, some several weeks, and some several months.

5. The cures were many of them incomplete.

6. Others were temporary *.

So that all the wonder we are called upon to account for is, that, out of an almost in-

* The reader will find these particulars verified in the detail, by the accurate enquiries of the present bishop of Sarum, in his Criterion of Miracles, p. 132, et seq.

numerable multitude which resorted to the tomb for the cure of their complaints, and many of whom were there agitated by strong convulsions, a very small proportion experienced a beneficial change in their constitution, especially in the action of the nerves and glands.

Some of the cases alleged, do not require that we should have recourse to this solution. The first case in the catalogue is scarcely distinguishable from the progress of a natural recovery. It was that of a young man, who laboured under an inflammation of one eye, and had lost the sight of the other. The inflamed eye was relieved, but the blindness of the other remained. The inflammation had before been abated by medicine: and the young man, at the time of his attendance at the tomb, was using a lotion of laudanum. And, what is a still more material part of the case, the inflammation after some interval returned. Another case was that of a young man who had lost his sight by the puncture of an awl, and the discharge of the aqueous humour through the wound.

The

The sight, which had been gradually returning, was much improved during his visit to the tomb, that is, probably, in the same degree in which the discharged humour was replaced by fresh secretions. And it is observable, that these two are the only cases, which, from their nature, should seem unlikely to be affected by convulsions.

In one material respect I allow, that the Parisian miracles were different from those related by Tacitus, and from the Spanish miracle of the Cardinal de Retz. They had not, like them, all the power and all the prejudice of the country on their side to begin with. They were alleged by one party against another, by the Jansenists against the Jesuits. These were of course opposed and examined by their adversaries. The consequence of which examination was, that many falsehoods were detected, that with something really extraordinary much fraud appeared to be mixed. And if some of the cases upon which designed misrepresentation could not be charged, were not at the time satisfactorily accounted for,

for, it was because the efficacy of strong spasmodic affections was not then sufficiently known. Finally, the cause of Jansenism did not rise by the miracles, but sunk, although the miracles had the anterior persuasion of all the numerous adherents of that cause to set out with.

These, let us remember, are the strongest examples, which the history of ages supplies. In none of them, was the miracle *unequivocal;* by none of them, were established prejudices and persuasions overthrown; of none of them, did the credit make its way, in opposition to authority and power; by none of them, were many induced to commit themselves, and that in contradiction to prior opinions, to a life of mortification, danger, and sufferings; none were called upon to attest them, at the expense of their fortunes and safety *.

* It may be thought that the historian of the Parisian miracles, M. Montgeron, forms an exception to this last assertion. He presented his book (with a suspicion, as it should seem, of the danger of what he was doing) to the king; and was shortly afterwards committed to prison; from which he never came out. Had the miracles been unequivocal, and had

M. Montgeron

M. Montgeron been originally convinced by them, I should have allowed this exception. It would have stood, I think, alone, in the argument of our adversaries. But beside what has been observed of the dubious nature of the miracles, the account which M. Montgeron has himself left of his conversion, shews both the state of his mind, and *that his persuasion was not built upon external miracles.*—"Scarcely had he entered the church-yard, when he was struck," he tells us, "with awe and reverence, having never before heard prayers pronounced with so much ardour and transport as he observed amongst the supplicants at the tomb. Upon this, throwing himself on his knees, resting his elbows on the tomb-stone, and covering his face with his hands, he spake the following prayer: *O thou, by whose intercession so many miracles are said to be performed, if it be true that a part of thee surviveth the grave, and that thou hast influence with the Almighty, have pity on the darkness of my understanding, and through his mercy obtain the removal of it.*" Having prayed thus, "many thoughts," as he sayeth, "began to open themselves to his mind, and so profound was his attention, that he continued on his knees four hours, not in the least disturbed by the vast crowd of surrounding supplicants. During this time, all the arguments which he had ever heard or read in favour of Christianity, occurred to him with so much force, and seemed so strong and convincing, that he went home fully satisfied of the truth of religion in general, and of the holiness and power of that person, who," as he supposed, "had engaged the Divine goodness to enlighten his understanding so suddenly." Douglass, Crit. of Mir. p. 214.

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